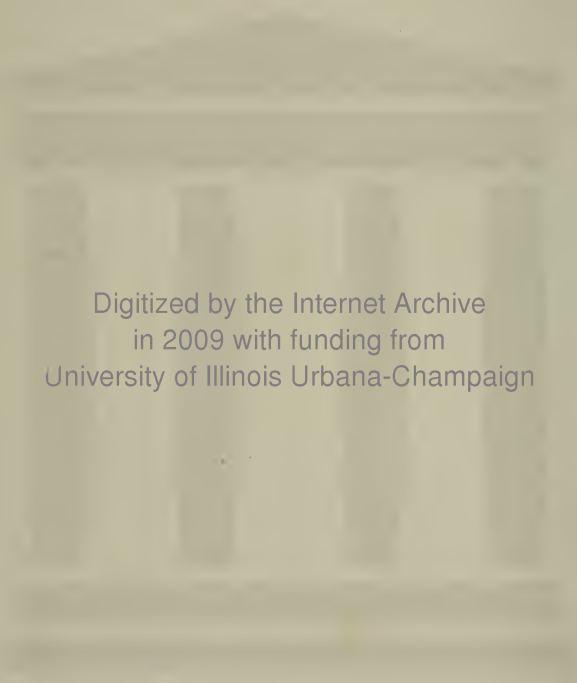


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FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.



FROM
GENERATION TO GENERATION.

BY
LADY AUGUSTA NOEL,

AUTHOR OF
"WANDERING WILLIE," "OWEN GWYNNE'S GREAT WORK," ETC.

"Dowglas! Dowglas!
'Tendir and trew."
The Houlate.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1879.

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Hungary:

CLAY AND TAYLOR, THE CHAUCER PRESS.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
LOOKING BACK	1

CHAPTER II.

WESTMINSTER CHIMES	38
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

GOOD INTENTIONS	75
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

"AUF WIEDERSEHEN"	107
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER V.

A LEGACY	139
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER VI.

DIANE	173
-----------------	-----

CHAPTER VII.

	PAGE
CROSSING THE FORD	203

CHAPTER VIII.

FAITHFUL FOUND	237
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

TENDER AND TRUE	272
LAST WORDS	309

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

CHAPTER I.

LOOKING BACK.

“O May Janette, O May Janette !
An ill weird ye must dree,
If ye shall meet the fause Kennet
Beneath the trysting-tree.”

ONE scene only, taken from the long ago.

It is the evening of the day on which Lord Douglas died. Even now yonder at Dalbraith he is lying unconscious, with hopeless eyes watching him, and upstairs Ronald is stretched out on his bed, ground down under the first hours of a long torture.

Out here by the loch-side it is a very lovely and peaceful September evening.

It is nearly dark. There is a dim glimmer here and there upon the shadowed loch, and a faint voice of wandering wind comes up from the water sighing—a whisper of wavelets sobs upon the shore. The night wind blowing

inland fresh and cool, passes on with a soft, perpetual southing through the trees in the garden of the Lady's Lodge.

Marion Stuart lingers alone on the shore. She is pale, and her eyes are heavy with tears. Alas! she is only one of the many who to-day mourn a common sorrow. The messenger came hurriedly awhile ago to bring the news, and summon her grandmother to Dalbraith; and when she was gone, Marion could not stay alone in the house. Its silence oppressed her; and still more, perhaps, did the subdued murmur from the kitchen, which showed that the fearful tidings of the day were being eagerly discussed.

So she went down to the loch-side, and gazed across the dark water towards Dalbraith. Mysterious—still, yet ever stirring—the shining stretches swept off into the darkness and brought to her no token.

Quiet and happy, and entirely uneventful, had been Marion's life hitherto. She knew so few people, never having had any companions except the two Douglas boys, Kenneth and Ronald, that the friends on her scanty list were to her singularly important and engrossing.

A child's heroine, a girl's ideal, the object of a very quiet but real enthusiasm, was Lady

Douglas to the little maiden. She was so beautiful, so noble, it was always such a pleasure to be near her, to watch how she did things — her slow movements and ‘grand’ ways, as others besides little Marion called her stateliness. She did not notice the girl much ; but Marion had known her all her life, and was not a bit afraid of her, though to her mind Lady Douglas never quite stepped down into the realms of every-day life.

Little Marion, learning her lessons and dutifully reading her ‘history books,’ used to identify Lord and Lady Douglas with all the personages she most admired. He was Leonidas and Sir William Wallace. Margaret was like Joan of Arc, or Vittoria Colonna ; her namesake, Queen Margaret of Anjou at the head of her troops, must have been as beautiful and brave.

Once, when Marion was quite a child, she was taken to Dalbraith to see some magic pictures that they called ‘tableaux vivants.’ The little girl never forgot them. Margaret and the boy Kenneth were made in one picture to represent Henry the Sixth’s luckless queen and son meeting the robber in Hexham Forest. What a noble, gracious queen, and what a frank, gallant-looking outlaw was Lord Douglas!

Then they changed the scene, and presently

Margaret stood before them in her exile and desolation—

“Anjou’s lone matron in her father’s hall.”

Lord Douglas, who had come round again among the audience, lifted up the little Marion that she might see better, and he repeated the line to her half aloud.

Colonel Douglas stood near the dethroned queen, rather too vigorous and manly a representative of poor old King René—but Margaret, with her beautiful bowed head! The grand, straight lines of her face fell easily into the mould of haughty sadness. She looked heart-broken.

It was thus that Marion had her to-night always before her sight, with that expression in her eyes. The girl, so powerless to help, would have given her life to comfort them over there. She stretched out her arms towards Dalbraith with infinite, impotent longing.

Suddenly, far off and faint, the sound of oars working in the rowlocks, reached her from the opposite shore; and, as she strained eyes and ears into the darkness, the noise grew more distinct, and an invisible boat came quickly on towards her. The oars splashed irregularly in the water, as if they were wielded by an

unskilful or a reckless hand. Marion ran down to the landing-place; the boat's keel grated against the bank, and its occupant sprang on shore. It was Kenneth, pale and wild-looking in the twilight.

"How is he?" asked Marion, meeting him.

He made no answer.

"You are sorry for Ronald?" he said, presently.

"Oh, bitterly!—bitterly sorry."

"You would be sorry for any one," he continued quickly, "that such a thing happened to?"

"Of course, Kenneth; of course I should; but what does that matter? Tell me about them. How is Lord Douglas? Did you see Ronald?"

"Yes; I did. You know,"—he spoke very slowly, and with a catch in his breath—"it was I that told him."

"Oh, Kenneth!—how dreadful for you!—poor fellow!"

"Marion, give me something to eat. I am starving. Perhaps food will take away this feeling; this horrible sick horror. Quick, let us go into the house. I know Granny is away."

When he had eaten—though for all his hunger he could not swallow much—he jumped

up, saying, "Now, Marion, come out again. I want to tell you something;" and Marion was frightened, for he was trembling from head to foot. "Come out," he said; "but not under the trees, for I want to see your face."

The wind, she feels, is rising, and the trees are shivering in it and moaning.

"You are sorry for Ronald?" he says, holding her hand as they stand together on the grass.

"You know I am. What is it, Kenneth?"

He is crushing her hand in his, and swinging it up and down with the unconscious force of one whose nerves are violently strung up. Marion struggles in vain to release herself; he does not even know that he is touching her.

"Look here, Marion. I am going to tell you a secret—something only one person knows. I must tell you, or I think I shall go mad. I must tell some one, and I can trust you best. Will you swear—solemnly swear—that you will not tell any one what I tell you?"

"No, Kenneth; it would not be right."

He dashes her hand away angrily. "I suppose you want to drive me mad. I tell you I must speak to some one. Don't, Marion—don't talk nonsense about oaths being wrong. I wouldn't ask you if it was wrong;

but I can't speak unless you swear to keep my secret. You *must* !”

“Granny would not like it,” answers the girl simply.

“You must not tell her. Good Heavens! you must not speak of it to her.”

“I don't want to know your secret,” says Marion, nearly crying. “Please, go away now. I can only think of poor Lord Douglas to-night.”

“Don't, Marion — don't speak of him.” Kenneth is violently agitated; she can hear his quick, panting breaths. “If you won't listen to me and keep my secret, I shall just go and throw myself into the loch.”

Poor little Marion!—she should not have believed him, and been so direfully frightened; but already she was unnerved by the day's events. It was very eerie out there in the gloaming, with the stems of the birch-trees glimmering pale and ghost-like out of the shadows, and Kenneth's wild words and wailing voice mixing with the moan that had come into the night air. She held his arm with her little trembling hand, and tried to quiet him.

“Marion, do for pity's sake promise me, and listen. I must speak to somebody. I must—I must !”

“I think perhaps I may promise, but I can’t take an oath,” said Marion, trembling and considering.

There was something that sounded different—less awful, to the poor child in a promise. Kenneth gave her no time to go back.

“There, yes; it’s the same thing. You have promised, Marion.” He asked for the third time, “You are sorry for Ronald?”

“Why do you ask me? Oh, Kenneth, if you would let me go!—and go away yourself.”

“Listen; you ought to be sorry for me, not Ronald;” and Kenneth whispered, leaning forward with his white lips close to her ear, “It was my gun, not his, that did it.”

“Did what? I cannot understand. Kenneth, you terrify me!”

“You know. My gun shot—”

“Shot Lord Douglas!”——

“Hush, hush, Marion; don’t scream like that!” and he put his hand roughly over her mouth.

“And you let them think it was Ronald?” cried the girl, shaking him off. “You did!”

“No, no; it was not me. Adam Haldane told me it was Ronald. I swear that I believed him when I went to Ronald,—and then he came and whispered to me that he had said

that to spare me and my father—but that I did it.”

“And you told no one?”

He saw her shrink away from him holding out her hands to keep him off. He saw the horror and repulsion in her face. Suddenly his mood changed; flinging himself on to the ground, he burst into a storm of wild, passionate sobs. “I thought you would pity me. It was not my fault. I thought you would comfort me—Marion, Marion!”

All the unreasoning womanly instincts of her nature awoke within Marion at the sight of him. There was no one in the world she loved as she had always loved Kenneth. She knelt down beside him on the grass.

“It’s not too late, poor Kenneth!—you can tell them. Do not cry so; you can go over to-night and tell them.”

“I can’t—I can’t,” wailed Kenneth. “It would kill my father. Oh, what has Adam done! I never would have deceived Ronald. I did not know; I never meant it.”

“It is not too late,” said Marion.

“Oh, I could not do it now. Every one knows now,”—a fresh burst of sobs checked him. “If only Adam hadn’t done it. If only he hadn’t! Marion, say something to comfort me.”

"You *must* tell." Marion's voice was resolute and low from the intensity of her feeling. "You could not live without telling."

"I can't—I can't."

She rose from the ground where she had been kneeling by him. "Then, Kenneth, I shall tell for you."

"You cannot ; you have promised." The new fear calmed him, and he got up and stood facing her. "Remember that ; remember your oath."

"Not an oath," murmured Marion faintly.

"Your promise then—it's the same thing."

She clasped her hands over her breast, and the look almost of a martyr came into her face and made it rapt and motionless in its woe, but she made no resistance. Her word, though half-unconsciously given, was sacred to her. He had trapped her in his grasping after sympathy, and she was helpless in the toils.

"You cannot speak—neither to Granny, nor to any one in the world. You understand that, Marion."

A long sigh came from her lips for answer.

"I could not have borne it alone," he went on rapidly. "It was too horrible. I was afraid I should shout it out before them all—before my father,"—he shuddered. "I wanted to get to you, Marion—only to you."

The burst of almost hysterical sobs had relieved him ; he spoke more coherently now, though Marion stood there like a statue, and made him no reply.

“I would give my right hand that it had not happened so—but I can’t speak yet. I can’t break my father’s heart. I couldn’t face him.”

“But Ronald,”—Marion just managed to articulate the words.

“You only think of Ronald ; but that’s not the worst—that’s not what haunts me—drives me mad. It is to think that my shot hit—poor Douglas.” He put his hands on both sides of his head, and rocked himself to and fro.

“How is he ? ” asked Marion presently.

“I don’t know—they said there was no hope.” After a few minutes he began again, unable in his restless misery to bear the silence. “I don’t know much. It was too dreadful at Dalbraith. I could not stay there. My father told me to go to Ronald, but I could not do that. The house was dreadful down-stairs after dark ; so silent, and with the dinner laid in the dining-room, and nobody to eat it. I was afraid some one would come into the hall and find me, so I came out, and then I saw the

lights here shining across the water, and I thought you would have something to say to make it better."

But Marion had nothing—only another passionate entreaty that he would tell his father.

He did not reply, but leant moodily over the garden-gate, staring across the loch that had grown nearly black now, for the twilight was over, and there was no moon.

"After all," he said, presently, "it cannot make so very much difference whose shot it was. It was an accident, and people are not blamed for an accident, are they? I heard everybody pitying Ronald. They all pitied him. You did too, Marion. It was less dreadful for him than it would have been for me; that was what Adam said. They were all awfully sorry for Ronald. If I had known how my father and all would feel about it, it wouldn't have been so hard to speak. Oh, I wish I had at once, without caring for what Adam said. If my father had looked at me as he did at Ronald I could have borne it. He said, 'I understand it all, my boy;' but I don't think Ronald cared, or heard him even."

"Your father is always kind," said Marion, with a sudden gleam of hope; "he would be kind now, and so sorry for you. Oh, do go

to him ; you will be so thankful when he knows."

He looked at her doubtfully for a moment, and her heart rose up within her ; but it was only for a moment.

"You don't know my father," he said, and he sank back into his attitude of despair ; "he has never been displeased with you."

Too well Kenneth knew his father's stern, simple code, in which to be ungenerous was to be dishonoured, and to swerve by a hair's breadth from the truth was to be guilty of a lie. "It is no use ; I cannot—and I will not !"

There was something in the way he said those last words that carried conviction and hopelessness to Marion.

She did not entreat him any more. She did not struggle against her fate ; but she felt as she stood there as if a dark, cold, heavy garment had been suddenly wrapped round her, shutting her out from the sunshine and the music, and the lightsomeness of life."

"I will pray to God, Kenneth," she said, gently ; "perhaps some day soon He will give you strength to speak." Kenneth would not turn his head as she went away ; he hung over the gate, half angry with her, half dazed with the horror of his position.

His story was unfortunately too true. Adam Haldane was the only person near him when he fired his fatal shot. Kenneth had been put out, and would not listen to the old soldier who warned him that he was shooting carelessly, and pushing forward so fast as to be dangerously near his cousin. When Adam knew that Lord Douglas had been hit, his first quick, cunning impulse was to shield Kenneth at any one's expense. He had no grudge against Ronald, but he was the heir, and everybody about the place loved him better than they did Kenneth. They would not be hard on him. And this catastrophe, if he knew the truth, would go far, Adam thought, to break the Colonel's heart.

His instinct was to deceive. He followed it in this instance almost without reasoning; but afterwards, he was glad of what he had done. No one suspected the mistake between the cousins. His story passed unchallenged. His only blunder, he thought, lay in having told Kenneth himself the truth. He expected to have won the boy's gratitude, and was frightened at his burst of reproach and horror. It was hard to get him, in his first agony of despair, to keep the secret. That was a real danger, and seriously alarmed Adam. The

disclosure once made now, he himself would be exiled from Colonel Douglas's presence for ever, and that would be a sentence worse than death to the false, faithless heart. But he knew of old how to work on the son's fear of his father, as well as on his love, and skilfully he set about his task. Poor little Marion had a powerful opponent. Kenneth wavered for a time between the two influences—the good and the bad—but Adam strained every nerve, for he knew that each day made his cause stronger. The confession, which would have been hard enough at first, grew to look more and more impossible as the days rolled on, and still Kenneth hesitated.

Colonel Douglas himself unconsciously increased the difficulty.

On the day of Lord Douglas's funeral, Ronald stood tearless and passive—moving, standing, kneeling, where he was put—his face never changing, as the words of prayer, of resignation, of joyful hope sounded in his ears. Some people thought him unfeeling, and by them Kenneth's demeanour was judged to be much more touching. Perhaps his grief was in its way as sincere. His eyes fixed themselves wistfully over and over again on his cousin's face. He turned more and more ashy pale as the service went on, and when the clods of

earth fell heavily on to the coffin, a stifled cry broke from him, and he stopped his ears to shut out the sounds he could not bear.

After all was over, Colonel Douglas found him lying on the grass, his face hidden, shaken all over by the sobs he had tried to suppress before. His father stood still and touched him with his foot. This excessive demonstration of sorrow appeared to him unmanly. Kenneth sprang up instantly, the colour rushing over his face.

“Can you do nothing to help your cousin?” asked Colonel Douglas rather contemptuously, for he had noticed, and been vexed by Kenneth’s avoidance of Ronald. “You don’t do much for him by giving way to your own feelings like this.”

“Father,” broke from Kenneth, “I am more miserable than he is.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked his father, after a moment’s astonished pause, his grey eyebrows drawing together.

Kenneth struggled to reply. There was a spasm in his throat, and his heart was beating as if it was going to burst. His voice was almost gone, but a wild longing to speak and to be rid of his burden was upon him. He raised his eyes to his father’s face.

“ Well, Kenneth ? ”

The brief stern tone, the flash of the keen eyes as they fastened on his face, seemed to paralyse him. His head swam ; his gleam of desperate courage faded away.

“ I mean that I am as sorry as Ronald,” he said indistinctly, grasping for support at the tree near which he stood.

When his father spoke again, his voice had wonderfully softened. “ Kenneth, you little know,” he said sorrowfully. “ God grant you may never suffer as that poor boy is suffering now—entirely blameless as he is.”

Kenneth gave a deep sigh. The chance of speaking was fast slipping away. A rush of mingled relief and disappointment overwhelmed him. Colonel Douglas went on with unusual gentleness : “ My boy, I think it might almost break my heart to know there was such a load laid on you, as in God’s mysterious Providence poor Ronald is now bearing. Only one thing, only one, could be worse to me—to know that you had ever acted dishonourably.”

In terror, Kenneth looked up. No ; there was not a shadow of suspicion on his father’s face. Again he sighed, but this time with a more complete relief. Those words seemed in some measure to justify his silence. Surely even

Marion would not bid him break his father's heart. And for Ronald there was such pity—such deep sympathy felt. It was not so bad for him. Colonel Douglas spoke of him almost with respect, as of one suffering innocently. He had called Ronald blameless. But what would he say of his own son if the truth were known? Still, when Colonel Douglas had gone on, and he was left alone, he flung himself back upon the grass, and tore it up with his hands, muttering, “Coward—coward—côward!” below his breath.

As long as Kenneth remained at home, the poor little sharer of his secret lived in a perfect fever of hope. He would tell his father. He had all but promised her to speak to-morrow. Perhaps before she saw him again it would all be known, and Marion's temples throbbed, her cheeks burnt, and her hands were as cold as ice. All night she slept restlessly, or lay awake wondering how it had fared with him, and when the first gleam of morning shone into her room she jumped out of bed to look out of the window towards Norman's Tower. She only saw the mist rise and float quietly away from the surface of the loch, and flocks of early awaking birds skim across the water; and in the cold calmness of the dawn she would lose hope,

to regain it an hour or two afterwards in double measure, when the sun rose up and painted the world with gay colours and golden gleams.

But Kenneth never came to tell her what she longed to hear. One glance at him when they met, a shake of the head if there were others present, an impatient turning away from her imploring eyes, and her heart sank down like lead. To one of her nature — scrupulously upright, brave, and justice-loving to a singular degree—any secret was a painful burden, but when it entailed suffering and unfairness to another she rebelled against it with all her heart and soul. And yet she could not hate Kenneth, cruel and selfish though she was forced to think his conduct. The child's heart clung to its old idol still. All would be well if it were not for Adam Haldane. It was almost as great a comfort to Marion as to Kenneth to lay the blame on him. People talk of broken idols, but there is nothing in the world more difficult to break. They may be cast down, once and again—their worshippers will only raise them up and cling to them more closely than before.

Kenneth went away at last without speaking, leaving her to bear the secret alone, and then Marion broke down. The fever which had been

supporting her went away, and for a time she was really very ill.

No one wondered. Things at Dalbraith were sad enough just then to make any one ill. Lady Beatrix nursed her, and "Ugly" watched beside her, and was good and comfortable, just as she used to be when Marion was three years old. The two talked much of Kenneth, and the girl liked to hear how good and handsome a little child he used to be.

While she was getting well she thought a great deal, and a quiet determination grew up in her mind to give her whole life, as far as she could, as an expiation of the wrong that had been done. How this resolution was to be carried out she scarcely knew. Perhaps some day the way would be made clear to her. It might be that she should yet prevail on Kenneth to tell all. It might be that in some way she could serve Ronald or his mother. She must at least prepare for her work by being strong, and watchful, and patient. Her own wishes she tried to set steadily on one side, and by slow degrees she became, if it is possible to be so, almost too self-controlled.

"Marion is old beyond her years. We have lost our children, Ugly," said Lady Beatrix, with a sigh.

It was very long before Kenneth returned to Dalbraith. During his holidays his father was often with his regiment, or if he was on leave he took his son abroad. Kenneth was intended for the Bar; and at other times they heard of him as working hard at Oxford, or going somewhere with a reading-party. All his tutors gave as their opinion that his clear head and keen, quick, reasoning powers promised great distinction in a learned profession. He had always been ambitious. London, Parliament, and office at some future day, used to be his boyish dreams.

His father acquiesced with a sigh. In his heart of hearts he thought either the army or the navy, the fittest profession for a gentleman and a Douglas, but the boy had a right to follow his own bent, and he ought to be very proud of having such a clever son. It was a great surprise to him, when about four years after Lord Douglas's death, Kenneth announced his strong wish to go into the army.

Norman Douglas was on the eve of getting his promotion. His severance with the active part of his profession was a pang, and he could not help a secret thrill of pleasure at any prospect that would still give him a connecting link with it. Openly, he grumbled; called his son

a capricious young dog, and wondered what freak had come over the rascal now. A soldier's life was no such bed of roses, he could assure Master Kenneth ; he might have to rough it a little more than in those comfortable chambers in the Temple he used to be so fond of talking about.

"I wonder what can have made him wish to change," said Lady Beatrix, for the twentieth time.

"I suppose the fellow feels the stirring of the old blood in him after all," replied the General, smiling and throwing up his head like a war-horse.

"And you give your consent, Norman?" asked Granny.

"I dare say the young Jack-a-napes will end by getting his own way ; he seems pretty much bent on it ;" and General Douglas tapped the letter he held with his glasses and tried not to look too much gratified.

He got Kenneth a commission in the Guards, and not very long afterwards the Crimean war began.

Marion hoped against hope that he would come home, if only for a few days, before he went out to the East. His battalion was under orders, but still she expected him to the last. He would not go, surely, to face danger,

and perhaps death, with the burden of his secret on him!—the time had come when he was certain to speak, for her sake, for Ronald's, for his own. But General Douglas went up to London to see him off, and Kenneth wrote his farewell to Granny—nothing was said. Would he speak to his father just before he sailed? It would be so easy on the eve of such a parting. When the General came back, Marion eagerly scanned his face. It was grave, a little anxious, but perfectly serene and satisfied; and a sore, hurt, angry feeling rose up in her heart, to be presently dashed down again, and turned into tender remorse, by the news of the Alma.

And so that weary winter went on. Marion was always with General Douglas, sharing with him the bitter hours of the long protracted suspense. How could she keep any displeasure in her heart against one of the soldiers who were before Sebastopol? Kenneth had escaped from the battles unhurt, but in the spring he was wounded in the trenches, and invalided home.

Perhaps no time had ever been as happy as this was to the young man. General Douglas hurried to Southampton to meet him, and as his father held him to his heart and thanked God for having spared his life, Kenneth

almost felt as if he should be glad to die while life was so full of blessing.

He very soon recovered his health sufficiently to join a battalion of his regiment that was quartered at the Tower, and everybody in London was very kind to the young wounded soldier. In some way, unaccountable even to himself, his year in the Crimea seemed to have separated him by a wide gulf from his previous life. He felt as if the past lay far behind him. The old trouble ceased for a time to haunt him, and he no longer looked on Marion as the arbitress of his fate. Kenneth threw himself with a good deal of spirit into his life in London; he made many friends, went to a number of parties, and enjoyed his popularity very much.

Sometimes he thought of getting leave and going down to Dalbraith. It would look strange if he put it off too long, but the idea gave him a cold shiver, and he pushed it away. He heard that Marion's father, Sir Charles Stuart, was coming home from India, and both she and her grandmother would be too much engrossed with him, to have a thought to spare for anybody else.

Besides, Marion—he was sure Marion would want to rake up the past again, and was it not

better to leave things as they were? Surely they had all suffered enough. Now Douglas was amusing himself abroad, and he (Kenneth) had seen the reality of war, and the grim face of death, and had left his boyhood with its mistakes behind.

It would be wiser for them all not to revive a terrible family history, the memory of which, except to those immediately concerned, was beginning to grow fainter. And—London was delightful—people were very kind indeed to him. Above all his father seemed proud of him and pleased with him. He was really beginning rather to enjoy his life, for the first time in all these years. He had better keep away from Dalbraith a little longer.

One night he had come up from Windsor, where he was at present quartered, to go to a great ball. As he reached the head of the crowded staircase he encountered Lady Douglas's brother Harold, now Lord Sandysmere, making his way leisurely towards the door. "How are you, Kenneth?" said the older man. "I have done my duty here, and am making my escape. You have just come, I suppose. Have you seen your people?"

"My people?" repeated Kenneth.

"Yes; your uncle—cousin—what is he? Sir

Charles Stuart, and little Marion. She is here this evening with her father."

"Marion here!" exclaimed Kenneth.

"To be sure. Did you not know she was in London? Her grandmother brought her up to meet her father. Well, you will find her in one of the rooms, and looking very pretty too. Come, there's a break in the crowd; our hostess is looking another way; I shall slip off." And Lord Sandysmere lost himself ingeniously in the throng.

The band was playing rather a noisy valse as Kenneth made his way into the long gallery; but for the moment the beating of his heart drowned all other sounds. Marion Stuart here—Marion Stuart!—how should he meet her, his little cousin, love, and playmate, Marion.

Eagerly he scanned all the faces that were within his ken, staring absently at some very familiar ones without perceiving their greetings to himself; seeking vainly the one face that had haunted him in its pleading earnestness, against his will, for years. He could not see her as he threaded his way as quickly as he could through the crowd, passing hastily from one room to the other. In the ball-room he paused to look through one set of dancers after another.

Kenneth had got rather a reputation as a good dancer, and several of his accustomed partners looked at him expectantly and wonderingly as he passed them by. But he did not want to dance or to amuse himself to-night—he wanted to find Marion.

At last, nearly at the end of the long room, backed by the heavy curtain of one of the windows, he caught sight of a face that sent all the blood to his heart with a sudden shock. Not dancing at the instant—standing quietly waiting while her partner performed *cavalier seul* in front of her—with her eyes fixed seriously on the shifting figures in the quadrille before her,—with the attentive and earnest look of old—was Marion.

Yes; tall—taller than he had expected—straight, slight, very fair, with the eyes that were of almost too dark and full a blue to match entirely with the masses of her blonde shining hair; with the dear, old, never-forgotten look of candour, trust-worthiness, and serenity. Yes—he had found Marion.

The music clashed out more loudly. She moved forwards, her partner spoke to her, and she bent towards him to answer; some one greeted her as she crossed the room, and she smiled and nodded, but all very quietly, and

in a way that made Kenneth feel there was something unusual and remarkable about her. He stood leaning against the wall, watching her with almost a dream-like sensation.

Marion at a London ball! Marion unaware and heedless of his presence! Marion listening calmly to her partner's inane speeches (for Kenneth was sure they were inane, and that he must be a prig); Marion who alone shared his secret, and with whom he had fancied so many meetings, and held such long imaginary conversations! She was to have been walking towards him across a purple moor, or standing on the shore of the loch with her eyes shaded by her hand, watching for his boat. Instead, she was dancing in a London ball-room, without a thought of him! It seemed to jar him all through, and if he could have made up his mind to cease watching her, he would have left the house at once. But he stood immovable, and never took his eyes off her. To the world at large—at least to that very small portion which concerned itself about him—it appeared as if the lady with whom he wished to dance had chosen another partner, and that he was looking on in jealous indignation. Perhaps that was not so far from the truth. He did not like to see Marion dancing with some one

else. Besides, a moment ago her expression, and the quaint gravity with which she moved, had brought back to him with curious distinctness the image of the little child who used to dance minuets with him in the firelight, years and years ago.

It was the same face still, only not sunburnt as it was then, and far, far more womanly and sweet; but the lines had only strengthened into greater precision, and the noble look of candour had remained.

Suddenly, as he studied her face thus intently, Marion raised her head, which had been bent down to listen to her partner (he was shorter than she was, Kenneth did not fail to observe), she looked up, her eyes caught his, and he knew in a moment, from her change of countenance, that she had recognized him.

She coloured deeply as she met his fixed, melancholy gaze; he half smiled, and before she had time to return the smile her partner claimed her attention. Kenneth watched her turn back with painstaking patience to the business in hand; just, he said to himself, as little Marion used to refuse to let her thoughts wander to the ponies or the boat, before she had mastered her daily portion of "Mrs. Magnall's Questions."

Kenneth moved now from his post of observation, and coasted round the room behind the dancers as quickly as he could. One or two people tried to stop him. He was an especial favourite with old ladies. To-night there was a worthy dowager, whose carriage he always found for her, left in speechless despair, as her charming Mr. Douglas glided past with only a sweet smile, and the briefest possible good-night.

The last figure was being danced at last, the music approached its final flourish, and as Marion turned from executing a curtsy that had descended straight from generations of Beaurepaire ancestors, and was much too good to be wasted on a modern ball-room, she found Kenneth standing close behind her.

"Marion," he said, holding out his hand. She gave him hers, her colour deepened again, and her eyes fell.

"You have not forgotten me?" he asked.

She smiled a little, and shook her head.

"No, indeed, that is not likely."

But it was easier to look at her from a distance than to talk to her. Kenneth tried to collect his thoughts, but it was some moments before he remembered to ask after Granny.

"Granny is very well," replied Marion without looking up ; but she did not move away, and her late partner, tired of waiting for her unnoticed, walked off huffily. Neither of them heeded his departure.

"How very little I dreamt of meeting you here to-night," continued Kenneth, still casting about for something to keep up a semblance of talk.

"They are cousins of Granny's husband," answered Marion, lucidly.

"Of your grandfather, Sir James Stuart ? so they are," and Kenneth tried to recover his London manner. "I had forgotten the connexion, but I thought of course you were in Scotland."

"I came to London with Granny to meet my father."

"And I was fancying you at Dalbraith. Marion, you might have let me know."

She bent over a table covered with roses of various tints, and Kenneth looked at her. "I wonder if she is thinking of *that*," he said to himself.

Two girls passed near them ; the elder was evidently initiating a pretty little newly-fledged sister in the ways of the world.

"Look, that is Kenneth Douglas," she said,

and both Kenneth and Marion heard her quite clearly. "If he is introduced to you, mind you dance with him. Nobody in London waltzes half so well."

Marion turned away from the roses, and quietly raising her eyes looked full at Kenneth for a moment. "She *is* thinking of that," he said to himself. "She wonders how I can be so frivolous." She seemed to him to have scanned him in that glance from head to foot.

"Marion," he began impetuously ; and then checked himself. This was neither the place nor the time for explanations. "Marion," he resumed, in a changed tone, "I want to see your father. Let us go and find him, and then I will take you to have some supper."

Just then a fair young man, rather out of breath, came towards them quickly through the crowd. He was the son of the house. "I am looking for my new cousin," he said, stopping before Marion ; "and my mother says I am to take her in to supper. May I?"

Marion hesitated ; she was new to the world's ways, and a message from the mistress of the house sounded to her very much like a command. She half withdrew her arm from Kenneth, who bowed and immediately stood back.

"I beg your pardon," said the other young man, looking at him.

"Not at all; it's all right;" and Kenneth bent his head again rather stiffly; and then Marion and the new-comer walked away together. He stood looking after them. It was a reversal of his relations with Marion that mortified and put him out. He had always hitherto been the leader, the conferrer of favours, the splendid young prince and patron. Here he was of no account compared with her.

But he was almost glad she was gone just now. Something in her face and voice so tried his self-command, that he felt as if in another minute or two it might have given way.

Oh the past!—how it had started up and become real again. The brightly lighted room, with the music, and the dancers, and the hum of voices had faded away; and instead he was surrounded by a twilit garden where the wind was sighing among the trees, and a child's awe-stricken white face was bent over him in his agony of remorse. It was a spectral scene with which he was but too familiar. He tried, as he had so often done before, to drive it away; it would not be lightly dismissed to-night.

The music of a valse rang out; the girl who had praised his dancing was standing not far

off. He went up hastily and asked her to dance. Presently the music and the whirling motion seemed to get into his head; his partner was worthy of him—she laughed gaily as they quickened their pace down the long room; Kenneth's colour came back—his heart beat—they went on longer and faster than any one else; and when they paused at last he saw Marion just opposite to him, standing in a door-way between her young host and a tall dark man whom he guessed to be her father, with her serious eyes looking quietly towards him.

He had to go on dancing after that, but the zest and the spirit were gone; he felt almost giddy, and the music stunned him with its swinging, never-ending measure. When it stopped at last, the door-way where she had been standing was empty—at least an enormously stout ambassador and a white-headed cabinet minister were discussing something eagerly on the spot where he last saw her.

As soon as he could dispose of his partner, Kenneth left the ball-room; but by this time people were beginning to go away. The staircase was crowded, and it was almost equally difficult to get up or down. When he reached the hall he found that Sir Charles Stuart had

gone into the outer vestibule to call for the carriage, and Marion was waiting patiently in the cloak-room for the little tight bundle into which her white cloak had been reduced. There was a chance of a moment's *tête-à-tête*, for her escort, intent on his hospitable duties, had left her, and was dancing vigorously overhead.

But—"Mr. Douglas," said a voice behind him, "I am alone to-night; will you be very kind, and just see if my servant has gone for the carriage?"

There was no help for it. When he returned one or two people had come downstairs, and were talking to Marion.

"Won't you come out into the hall?" he asked impatiently. "Your father will never find you here."

"Has the carriage come?" said Marion, as she took his arm, but he did not hear her question.

"I hope you are not going to stay in London long," he said abruptly.

"Why?" inquired Marion, opening her eyes.

"I don't like to see you here," he rejoined hurriedly. "One can't have a word with you"—a moment's pause—"You are too good for London, Marion."

"Sir Charles Stuart's carriage stops the way."

"There—of course—I told you so. Come along. I had rather think of you at Dalbraith."

"Perhaps you don't very often remember Dalbraith now," she said, in her quiet way. He turned towards her quickly and their eyes met. Some unspoken significance in the words struck them at the same moment—both coloured deeply.

"Marion, are you coming?" called her father, and Kenneth took her through the hall rapidly, and put her into the carriage without another word.

"Good-night," said Sir Charles, as he followed her.

"May I come and see Lady Beatrix to-morrow?" asked Kenneth, but he hardly heard the answer, the carriage was so quickly hustled out of the way, and shouts of "Mrs. Hamilton Simpson's carriage" filled the air.

"Who was that young fellow whom you seem to have frumped, Marion?" asked Sir Charles as they drove down Piccadilly. "I wasn't introduced, but I thought him very good-looking."

"It was Kenneth, father; Kenneth Douglas."

"What? Norman's boy, the guardsman?"

You don't say so. Why did you not tell me? We ought to have asked him to dinner, or luncheon, or something. I meant to come and make acquaintance with your friend, and then I was in such a fuss about the carriage. I thought they were going to keep us there all night. Really!—so that was dear old Norman's son. I am sorry I didn't know."

"He will come to see Granny," said Marion.

"Ah, I dare say. Well, Marion, how did you like your ball? I wonder how many years it is since I was at a party in that house. I was quite a boy, just going out to India, and it was in the old Lord's time."

When she reached her room Marion stood at the window for a long time looking out.

She had often watched the sun-rise at Dalbraith, but never before had seen the pure, clear, lovely light that comes stealing over the smoke-dried roofs of London houses, before the great city wakes up and lights its fires.

"I have seen Kenneth," she said, half aloud at last as she turned away; but her heart was still beating fast, and she shivered as she lay down in her bed, and watched with weary yet excited eyes, the faint touches and bars of light that lay upon her curtain, the pale finger-marks of the dawn.

CHAPTER II.

WESTMINSTER CHIMES.

“ We twa ha’e run about the braes,
And pu’d the gowans fine,
But we’ve wandered mony a weary foot
Sin’ auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidl’t i’ the burn,
From morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid ha’e roar’d
Sin’ auld lang syne.”

MARION and her grandmother were staying in one of those old-fashioned houses in Whitehall, the gardens of which used to reach down to the edge of the river.

Its mistress, Miss Montrose of Dunethar, was one of the oldest friends that Lady Beatrix possessed. They had been young girls together in Edinburgh, and had never lost their love for one another during the long course of their widely-differing lives. Miss Montrose’s house had always been the home of Lady Beatrix during her rare visits to England. It was a

pretty old house, and moreover, there were few pleasanter ones to be found in London.

Old Miss Montröse was a woman who had lived a great deal in the world, and had made friends wherever she went. She had been a great wit in her day—perhaps a little bit of a “blue-stocking,” but she was full of talent and charm, and distinguished men almost always took to her.

There were people coming and going in her house all day long—clever people well worth meeting—idle people who came to see the clever ones—struggling people, in the morning, who wanted her advice and help—tired people in the evening, who were glad after the day’s work, to have the rest and refreshment of her kindness and pleasant talk.

Lady Beatrix, long unaccustomed to the bustle of London, used to escape to her own room to rest, but the hostess never seemed tired. She sat all day in the library overlooking the river, with an old-fashioned white drawn-silk bonnet on her head, often writing her letters while her visitors talked to one another, or sat under the trees in her strip of garden.

There was a tranquil effect about it all that was doubled by the consciousness of the teeming life and hurry of the surrounding town.

The house itself was quiet, lying far back from the turmoil of the noisy streets, and looking out on the other side over the silent highway of the river.

There were several people in Miss Montrose's library when Kenneth made his appearance there on the afternoon after he had met Marion. A round tea-table stood in one corner; voices came in from the garden; at the foot of the steps leading to it he could see Marion standing, and a young man, who looked like a foreigner, was leaning over the balustrade beside her.

"Granny" came to greet him with her own quiet but ardent warmth of welcome. She had not seen him since he went to the Crimea, and she drew him down on to the sofa by her side, with a thousand loving anxious inquiries. "You are still looking pale, Kenneth. Are you quite strong again, my dear?"

"Oh yes, Granny; thanks. I am all right now."

"And you are quartered at Windsor? That is very hard when we are in London—we who never come. You must come up as often as you can while we are here. I want to hear all about the battles. Ah, my boy, we thought of you."

Kenneth answered and smiled, but still his eyes would wander to the window.

"I saw Marion last night," he said presently.

"Ah, yes ; at that fine ball—and she never showed you to her father. You know I have him at home now, Kenneth. Imagine whether I am happy."

"Yes ; I heard. I was so glad, Granny ;" then he peeped again under the striped sun-blind, and asked, "Who is that down there with Marion ?"

She leant forward. "Oh, that is Agénor de Beaurepaire, my cousin René's youngest son. René sent him to me. He is just named attaché here, and he comes to see us often. He seems a nice, good boy."

"How tall Marion has grown."

"Has not she ?—ah, she does not know you are here, and she will scold me. Let us call her."

They went and stood in the window together. "Come up here, children," said Lady Beatrix. "Marion, here is Kenneth."

Marion looked up, and began rather slowly to ascend the steps. At the same moment Miss Montrose came back from seeing some friends off in the adjoining room, and Kenneth was presented to her.

"Ah, a Crimean hero," she said kindly. "We don't know how to make enough of them ; do we, Marion ?"

"How do you do, Kenneth," said Marion's clear grave voice at the same moment.

Kenneth felt very uncomfortable at being called a hero in Marion's presence; he could not help wondering what she thought about it. The others went on talking, and she stood looking at the cup she was holding in her hand. He began watching her again as he had done last night, and trying to guess at her thoughts—he could not, for thinking of her, attend to what was being said round him.

"Kenneth," said Lady Beatrix, touching his arm, "Miss Montrose is speaking to you."

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, starting.

"I was only asking you if you had been home to Dalbraith since you came from the Crimea."

"No," he said, "not yet—I hope,"—and he hesitated,—“that I shall get leave soon.”

"Ah, what a welcome they will give you; their Highland laddie safe again from the wars."

Kenneth felt more and more uncomfortable.

"Only," he said, trying to make some answer, "that we have not been fighting the French."

"Ah no," rejoined Agénor de Beaurepaire, possessing himself of Lady Beatrix's hand, and

kissing it in his little empressé French way ;
“we are friends now for ever. Is it not so,
Madame ?”

“Your cousin, Lord Douglas, is still abroad,
is he not ?” again asked Miss Montrose.

“I believe he is coming home by Japan and
China,” replied Kenneth in a low voice.

“He will be jealous of your laurels,” said
another lady. “They think so much of soldiers
in the Highlands. You will quite have cut
him out at home.”

He looked up embarrassed, and his eyes met
those of Marion. Both coloured crimson, just
as they had done last night.

Was it his fault, thought Kenneth, that
people would say such things ? Would Marion
think him vain as well as heartless, coming
before her to boast of being a Crimean hero—
he to whom she must always bring associations
so widely different. He could not bear that she
should think ill of him. She might not know
how he disliked the kindly flattery—and then
those dreadful allusions to Ronald. It was very
hard on him. Ah, if she could tell what a load
he carried on his breast ! (It had been heavy
enough since their meeting last night.) He gave
a deep sigh, true and perfectly unconscious ;
then he found that Marion was looking at him

earnestly, but the moment he perceived it, she turned away again.

Lady Beatrix spoke to him, and he strove to bear his part in the talk, and to be, or at least to seem, gay and well at ease. Once or twice he attempted to address Marion, but as he recovered himself she grew colder, graver, more silent than before.

She looked like a quiet, beautiful, severe young judge, with her downcast eyes, and the pure outline of her face.

Could she really be Marion, his little champion of old days, his childish friend? What would the whole world be to him, he felt suddenly, if he had lost her love. Oh, if he could only be half-an-hour alone with her. Why did she remain so persistently in the centre of this ring of strangers?

Guests went and came. Lord Sandysmere had come in, and was speaking to Marion.

"Yes, I like London," she said, in answer to a question; "at least I like this house. I do not think it can be pleasant to live in a noisy street."

"Well," observed Miss Montrose, "I never want to go into the country. All the year round I have my five smoky trees, and my black sparrows, and my river to look at, and I am content."

“Some day,” said Lord Sandysmere, “they will be making a great embankment along the river, like the quays in Paris, and you will lose your garden and your view.”

“I hope I may be dead first,” she answered energetically.

“The quays in Paris are fine,” observed Agénor with gravity.

“Yes,” said Lady Beatrix; “but the river! I lose all my time looking out of my window at the crowds of boats—and it is so beautiful at night.”

“Ah, the ‘péni-boat,’” said Agénor. “I never tire to watch them; they go so fast—piff.”

“Kenneth has not seen the ‘péni-boat,’” said Harold. “Take him down to see them from the terrace, Marion. I want to talk to Granny about a letter I have got from Margaret.”

“Will you come?” gravely asked Marion.

Kenneth followed her, and so did Agénor.

“Margaret has not heard yet from Ronald,” they heard Lord Sandysmere say, as they walked away.

“Do you go to the ball to-night?” asked Agénor, as neither of his companions spoke.

“No,” answered Marion, “I don’t often go to balls.”

“But there are so many,” he continued. “I

cannot go to all. One wishes to do right, but it is embarrassing to choose."

"You had better ask my cousin," said Marion; "he can tell you all about the balls."

"I—I hate them," exclaimed Kenneth.

"Do you?" she replied quietly.

They had reached the terrace that overhung the river. The "péni-boats" were rushing by at full speed—passing each other again and again, as they raced up and down the stream—the barges floated deliberately—great ships came sailing up, and small rowing-boats darted in and out among them all. Beyond lay the opposite bank and the docks, with church spires and tall chimneys rising out of a mist of grey and gold, that was made of smoke and sunset.

Some one called to Agénor from the house, and he left them.

"It is beautiful, I think," said Marion, standing still to look over the river; "odd, but beautiful, with the pale red haze on the other side, and the windows gleaming through it here and there like fire, and the black boats in front—"

"Marion," interrupted Kenneth abruptly, "you may suppose that I forget, but I never do—no; not for an hour."

She drew a quick breath and leant over the terrace-wall.

“You may say what you choose, and pretend that I only care for balls and gaiety and trash ; of course I cannot prevent you from thinking what you please—but you might have a little kindness—a little common consideration—if only for the sake of the days you have forgotten.”

She made a little inarticulate interjection, half of wonder, half of indignation.

“Though you have tried to sting me by every word you said, I have been patient, because I do believe you have some feeling for me still, different as you are from all that I have dreamt and hoped for. Give me a little time to get used to the new Marion. I do not know her yet—and then we will talk about the balls as much as you please.”

“Nonsense,” she said, a little impatiently.

“Nonsense ; ah, well, I wish it were nonsense. Are your words and looks nonsense, and my thoughts ? See, Marion, I did not think it was *you* who would visit on me so heavily the mistakes and the wrong-doing of others. In all these years I have counted on you—on your sympathy, on your understanding of the cruel bar that has been thrown across my life. I have said to myself sometimes, ‘ Well, Marion knows—the pain, and the doubt,

and the motive of my actions. She saw, and she knew it all."

He paused, and appeared to be expecting an answer, but though she raised her eyes slowly to his face, she did not speak.

"It seems I am mistaken," he said, looking at her steadily. "It seems that time changes every one. I never thought it would change you, Marion."

"I have not changed," she said, in a low voice.

He gave a short laugh. "Do you think *my* little Marion, the Marion I knew, would have met me as you did last night, with a bow and a smile, and a few words when she had a minute to spare from other people; and a sort of doubt, not quite expressed, but civilly implied, whether Dalbraith was a place I still happened to remember or not?"

"You are unfair, Kenneth."

"No; for those words cut, Marion, whether they were meant to hurt or not."

"They were not meant," she said.

"Not meant?—not meant really? Say that again, and give me your hand. I am too ready, too glad to believe what I long to believe. I will not say again you meant to be unkind, but I have dreamt of seeing you once more, longed

for it, thought of it out there by night and day, pictured to myself what we should say to one another—and you would not even speak to me for five minutes when we met, but went away with the first stranger you came across.”

“Kenneth, you know I could not help that.”

“No ; well—Heaven knows I don’t want to be unreasonable, and to meet unexpectedly like that, was hard on you as well as on me—I dare say we neither of us quite knew what we were about ; but to-day, just now, when you told that French boy that I thought of nothing but balls ; when you looked at me—do you think I don’t know your face ?—do you think I could help feeling that you were hard, and cruel, and unjust ?”

She shook her head slightly. “No ?—did I judge wrongly again ? After last night I may not have been fit to decide anything very coolly, but can you deny that in your looks, and your manner, and your words, there has been a meaning,—a something, that seemed to imply blame ? Answer me that, Marion.”

He had gone on so quickly from one thing to another, without giving her a chance of speaking, that as yet she had attempted no reply. And indeed everything he said—his reproaches, the way he looked at things—only served to

bewilder her more and more. He stopped now resolutely, waiting for her to speak, and she tried with all her power of self-control to summon up strength to do so quietly and truly.

"Kenneth, you know," she begun, and then her voice failed. In what words could she clothe her meaning the most tenderly, the least woundingly?

"Well, Marion," he said softly. "I know—"

"You know how I have grieved for you—always. I have thought of it all this time, and hoped, but—" she stopped again.

"Go on," he repeated, looking at her fixedly.

"You know too that there is something I have always felt that you were bound to do"—she felt his sudden start and change, both of attitude and expression, but she steadied her heart and voice: "If I have seemed to blame you, you know why it is."

In his turn he made no answer for a time. One or two people whom neither of them knew came up on to the terrace, looked down at the river, glanced at the two standing there with a little curiosity perhaps, and passed on. Till they were quite gone out of hearing he did not move or speak.

"Yes," he said then, in a concentrated voice,

as if he was putting a great strain on himself, "I suppose I expected too much. I suppose the person I used to turn to in my thoughts, on whose understanding and sympathy I counted so much, *was* an imaginary person, after all. You were only a child. How could you understand?"

"But, Kenneth, though it was so hard on you—"

"Oh," he said, with an impatient gesture, "you need not explain. I bow to your decision. I accept your blame. So be it."

"Kenneth," she exclaimed, in a choked voice, "Oh Kenneth! if you only knew—if you only knew—"

"Well, I am listening."

But she wrung her hands together, for she could not speak intelligibly.

"If I only knew what? That you are sorry for me after all,—is that what you mean? You well may be, Marion."

She made a desperate effort. "If you knew all that Ronald has suffered."

"Oh," he answered slowly, "you meant that; if I knew what Ronald has suffered—while my life has been so happy, I suppose? Now listen, Marion. Did you ever love any one very much, and care about their being fond of you?"

All my life long—(you may think all this ridiculous if you please, I don't much care now)—I have been struggling to be something to my father, and you ask me to make him hate me. He wouldn't hate me? Well, you must allow me to have my own opinion about that. We may leave it undecided just now. I want you to listen for a minute. When I was a boy I worked hard at school—fagged day after day when I had much rather have taken it easy as the others did—because I had a foolish notion that he would be pleased if I got on well—that it would make him proud of me. I suppose it all sounds rather weak, but I had a sort of adoration for him in those days. I never told anybody, but I believe poor old Haldane knew it somehow. I would have died to please him. I soon saw I had failed. He did not care two straws about school-prizes. Why should he? he had been a soldier all his life; but he tried to pretend he thought it very fine. However, he was rather pleased when I began to shoot well—(how odd it all seems to look back upon)—and as soon as I saw that, I was in a perfect fever to beat Ronald. I could not tell any one in the world but you—(I could not speak of it even to you, Marion, but that it is all over, and it does not matter what a

miserable, weak fool I was then)—how I used to lie awake with my heart beating on the chance of a word of praise from him, or how afraid I was of him. Boys are not supposed to mind hard words, are they? But I did.

“Well, then came the time when old Haldane, meaning to serve me, or rather to shield my father from distress, smashed all my life to pieces. If I had spoken then—What did you say? Did you say you wished I had?”

“It is useless to wish that now,” faintly said Marion.

“Just so. And no one knows as you do why I could not speak. You knew too why, a little later, I gave up everything in the world I cared for, to go into the army. You knew I had no liking for soldiering. Whatever ambition I had was in quite another direction; but I felt you would understand,—and I think he was pleased, Marion. He never said it in so many words, but I believe he liked it; didn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“You were with him and saw it pleased him? In common charity you may tell me that, for it is not so very much satisfaction I have got out of giving up my own life.”

“He was very, very glad.”

"I thank you." He stopped for a moment or two. "You had thought hard thoughts of me even then, Marion. Perhaps I wanted to prove to you and to myself that I was not the coward you believed I was. And now," he went on quickly, "since this Crimean business—Marion! if you had seen my father's face when I came home,—if you knew what it was to have him as he is! Oh," he broke off, "I can't speak of it!—but don't ask me to break his heart just now."

"Miss Montrose wishes to know," interrupted the voice of Agénor de Beaurepaire, "if you will dine with her this evening; and Lady Beatrix is afraid," he added to Marion, "that there is a mist coming up from the river. She sent me to bring you in."

Kenneth and Marion turned directly, the young Frenchman lingering behind for another look at the shipping.

"Kenneth," said Marion, as they walked along the gravel-path, "Uncle Norman is a strong and a just man. I believe he would rather suffer than that a great injustice should be done to Ronald."

"Ronald again!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Ronald be ——"

"I asked Miss Montrose," once more inter-

posed Agénor, and he came beside Marion with a very serious face, "and she thinks I had better go to-night to Lady Mary Beaufort's, and then to Chester House."

"Very well," responded Marion mechanically; and when they reached the house she saw her father and General Douglas standing on the steps.

She could not recover from the miserable impression that her talk with Kenneth had made on her. Perhaps she was hardly calm enough to judge quite fairly of all that he had said, or to perceive how curiously he deceived himself, and by what a strange twisting of the facts he managed to free himself from blame. It was always the unfortunate circumstances brought about by Adam Haldane, that he dwelt upon. He really and sincerely believed that he was as much to be pitied as Ronald, and as much the victim of a deception. Marion dimly saw all that, but she did not dwell on it much. She had been deeply touched by Kenneth's confession of his long love for his father. His words, his voice, his face, had all borne the evidence of a deep sincerity. She had seen how his hand as it rested on the terrace-wall was trembling, and the violent quivering of the muscles round his mouth.

And was there no truth in all that he had said ?

She remembered vividly her uncle's suppressed delight when Kenneth elected to follow his father's profession ; the ill-concealed pride and the eagerness with which he set about getting the foolish boy his commission.

And then she thought of last winter. She could see the study at Norman's Tower, and the table all strewn with war-maps and plans of Sebastopol. Early and late the General's white head was bent over those plans, comparing them with the newspaper reports, following the position of that one regiment, and pointing it out with a finger that would tremble despite of all his efforts.

She saw him watching for the newspapers, shutting himself up to be alone when he opened them first, reading them aloud afterwards, with a composure and steadiness that had been won in those solitary hours, trying to spare Granny all the harrowing details of heroic suffering and hardship that pierced his own heart ; smiling at Grizel's shuddering wonder how poor dear Kenneth could go through it all so cheerily, and answering her in his old simple formula--
" Kenneth is a gentleman."

She recalled the coming of the news of the

Alma, later of Inkerman, and the days of waiting until the lists of killed and wounded came out,—those days of quiet, patient, proud, and silent anguish.

Then she saw him kneel and weep when the good tidings came, thanking God humbly that his boy had done his duty.

Was it she—Marion—who had been beside him all that time,—who had watched and waited, wept and prayed with him,—was it she who wished his happiness to be destroyed, his pride to be laid low?

That very evening, as they sat at dinner, she noticed the inward glow that lighted up his face; she heard his voice soften in the old-fashioned, “A glass of wine with you, my dear boy,” that he addressed to his son. And her ear caught the satisfaction in his tone as some military question was referred to him, and he answered carelessly, “Don’t ask an old campaigner like me; I suppose the young soldier here can tell us all about their new-fangled ways.”

Kenneth, as if he read Marion’s thought, turned his eyes appealingly towards her.

It was a new, keen pain. For the first time a doubt, a perplexity came over her. For the first time Kenneth’s duty did not seem so clear,

his path so plainly marked ; for the first time false lights and conflicting duties dazzled her sight. Poor Marion !

Oh, if Kenneth might be silent, if his father might be spared !—if she herself could in some unknown way put right, by the sacrifice of her whole life, the wrong that had been done !

On one side stood her uncle and Kenneth ; on the other, in stern array, Truth and Justice, —Ronald and Lady Douglas.

When Kenneth was gone, and Agénor, painstaking and conscientious, had started off to his first party, Marion went down again on to the terrace in the moonlight. The airy chimes from St. Margaret's Church came along the river from Westminster, and then sounded the deep booming of Big Ben's great voice. She hid her face upon her hands and bowed herself down on to the wall, feeling as if her life was being rent in two.

She had almost ceased to blame Kenneth. It is not easy to blame the person whose voice stirs your heart as no other voice can, and whom you can only look at through the golden mists of childish memory.

He was to her like one under the power of an evil enchantment—unhappy, struggling, repentant, yet nearly powerless to get free.

And the work that was given her was to try and release him. By patience, by prayer, by self-forgetfulness, and by courage. Her heart rose to meet the task. The only hard part was that long waiting in the dark, until something she could attempt should be placed in her way. To release Kenneth, or else in some way to atone for the suffering he had caused—the first was her hope, the second would be her consolation if better things should fail.

Life was opening and spreading itself out before her in grave, dark colours. How many years older she felt than that young Agénor de Beaurepaire, with his evening parties and his serious earnestness about trifles. In her ignorance Marion even believed that she felt older than the elderly people who were talking so peacefully in the lighted room she had just left, with no secrets to weigh them down, or conflicting duties to perplex them. How little she knew of their past—of the battles, the wounds, the defeats and victories, that all belonged now to the time which is gone !

Youth, and the present—these are the great realities. And then for a moment it seemed to her almost hard that the careless joyousness that belonged to her age should be denied her. Other girls whom she had seen last night

looked so free and happy. Why must she fight, and be lonely? The consciousness of solitude, never so oppressive as in a great city, weighed on her; all the more because of the thrill and excitement of a life that she felt was all round her, but did not touch her. She had no part in it all. The roar of the carriage-wheels seemed full of stir and purpose. Distant lights sparkled from the bridges, and along the river far-off music rose and fell with fitful gaiety—a murmuring hum of voices was in the air. Was everybody joyous and busy except herself?

Presently the clocks struck again at Westminster. To Marion's ears it appeared as if two voices spoke to her in them. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," rang out from the sweet silvery chimes. "How noiseless falls the foot of time, that only treads on flowers."

Then the mighty hammer clashed down. "Life is solemn: hours are precious: they are passing."

The chimes were for such as Agénor, the warning voice for her.

It happened that she scarcely saw Kenneth again before she returned to the Highlands, but she knew that he was coming to stay with his father as soon as he could get leave. Dalbraith seemed wonderfully quiet when they

reached it. Sir Charles Stuart was gone abroad. General Douglas had come back before Lady Beatrix on account of the illness of his old servant, Adam Haldane. One of the first things Marion heard at home was, that old Adam was dying.

She had always been rather afraid of him ; and since the time that Kenneth had shared his secret with her, the old soldier had taken her in aversion, and was perpetually trying to frighten her by snarling, and scowling at her under his red eye-brows. But now Marion asked to go and see him. Was not this something that she could do ? Might not Adam be persuaded before he died to tell the true story of Lord Douglas's death ? She must be brave, and forget the shrinking she had always felt from him.

"Miss Marion has come to see you, Adam," said the General, as he took her into the room.

"Aye," responded a voice that was changed, broken, fallen, and quite strange to Marion.

And it was a very old face that lay upon the pillow,—rough and unshaven, the mouth fallen in, the small restless eyes dim, but still moving about quickly. Marion came up trembling to take his hand. He did not move it towards her. It felt rigid, bony, and cramped when she put hers upon it.

"Poor Adam!" she said gently, "you are very ill!"

"Aye," repeated the deep voice again, and his breath laboured; "vera ill."

General Douglas patted the old man's shoulder kindly, and the restless eyes fixed themselves on his face.

"Miss Marion is going to stay with you for a little while, old friend," he said. "I shall not be long away."

"Aye."

He pointed Marion to a seat, and went quietly out of the room. It was what she had hoped for, and yet she felt strangely helpless, left alone with this weird-looking, old, dying man.

He took no heed of her, only groaned now and then; and when he opened his eyes let them stray aimlessly about the room.

Marion clasped her hands and waited. It seemed to her cruel to bring the troubles and wrong-doing of the past back to one who lay exhausted on the threshold of another life. Would it not be pardonable and right to speak only pleasant words of peace and hope in the dying ears? Would it not be more fitting to take up that Bible which her uncle had left half-open beside the bed, and to read of rest for the heavy-laden?

She stretched out her hand to take the book, but as she touched it, some of its real spirit seemed to pass into her heart. Repentance—truth—confession,—were not these its teachings? Should she dare to speak of peace where no peace ought to be? Marion lifted the book on to her knee, and held it there to give herself courage, but she did not open it.

“Adam,” she said presently, leaning forward and speaking in a clear voice, “you remember me, don’t you?”

“Aye,” he said once again; “it’s Miss Mer-ryan. I mind ye fine.”

“And Kenneth?” asked Marion.

“Kenneth!” he repeated, “Kenneth!—the bairns were aye together.”

“You loved Kenneth?” persisted Marion.

“Weel eneuch, well eneuch,” answered the old man.

“I saw Kenneth the other day. He is not happy, Adam. There is something you can do for him.”

Adam turned his eyes on her with a look that, apathetic as it was, had in it a gleam of suspicion.

“I canna be fashed,” he said presently.

“It would not trouble you much. I know you would be glad to serve him if you could, for his father’s sake.”

No answer.

"Would you not, Adam?" she repeated gently.

"I dinna ken what ye will be speiring for," he answered uneasily.

Marion heard a footstep outside the door, and fearing that her uncle might be already coming back, she bent down and whispered hastily, "You and Kenneth have a secret, Adam. Tell it to his father before it is too late."

Once more there was no answer. Marion waited; the footstep outside passed by.

"You heard me, Adam?"

"I wish folks wad let me be," he said at last, querulously. "I've nane sae lang to live—"

"I know, I know!" she interposed. "Oh, Adam, you would not like to die with such a secret!"

"Wha said there wad be a secret?" he asked, with a cunning glance.

"You know Kenneth told it me. Adam, have pity on us all;—for your own sake, for Kenneth's, for poor Lord Douglas—"

"Hae done! hae done!" He sprang up suddenly, raising himself in his bed with a strength she had not believed him to be capable

of, and his voice rose to a kind of piping scream: "How dare ye try to scare a dee'in man!" and he shook his bony, trembling fist at her.

Terror seized on Marion. She flew towards the door, then paused; considered, gathered her courage together, and turned back. The poor old dying man, he could not hurt her. She looked at him. He was still sitting up, his grey lips moving convulsively, his face working—a ghastly face, that filled her with a great pity added to her fear.

"Adam, my poor old friend," she said, going back to the bed-side, "I did not mean to make you angry."

He fell back with a deep groan as if exhausted. Trembling, she moistened his lips with a cordial that stood on the table, and waited. Gradually the wandering and apathetic look crept again over his face.

But Marion felt she must speak now, or else for ever hold her peace.

"Adam," she said, "you are soon going to where there are no secrets,—to God, before whom all hearts are open. I charge you to speak before you die, for the sake of those whose lives you have injured, and for the sake of your own soul!"

He listened evidently, for his hand ceased its nervous movement on the bed-clothes.

"What would ye gar me do?" he said at last.

"Oh, Adam, tell Uncle Norman!" answered Marion, falling on her knees.

He looked all round the room, and then his eyes came back to her face. She saw a look of doubt, a gleam of light, then a sudden expression of fear. He moved his head and sighed. She could not bear to watch the struggle that she thought she read upon his face, and she went away to the open window and looked out, scarcely breathing in her eagerness.

When at last she turned back to the bedside Adam lay quietly asleep.

But not for a single disappointment would Marion give up the task she had set herself to fulfil. Day after day she went back and faced the apathy, the feeble anger, the fretful weariness with which the old man met her, steeling her heart against her own longing to leave him in peace, and forcing her pleading words on his unwilling ears. She had ceased to expect much, but she went on hoping simply against hope. She did not know that in her earnest wistful face and quiet patience, there was something that helped her cause better than her words.

One day she had been kneeling beside his bed for a long while, gently chafing his cold hands, and trying to soothe his restlessness, when General Douglas came in.

Adam's eyes always gave a welcome to his master, and they fancied that his mind was clearer when "His honour" was in the room. He looked up now.

"Where'll Master Kenneth be the noo?" he said faintly; "I wad fain see him before I go."

Marion could not repress the start with which she heard the name.

"He is coming here in a few days," her uncle answered; "but I can write to-day and bid him hasten as much as he possibly can. The post has not gone yet."

"Aye."

The General went away to write. Adam closed his eyes with a groan.

"Dear Adam," said Marion, gently, "Kenneth will come to you, I know."

She was trembling from head to foot, but she tried to steady her voice, and the hands that still held his chill, stiff fingers. He drew them away with a peevish look of vexation. "Let me be," he said impatiently.

But when Marion prepared to steal away,

leaving him to the nurse who had come in, he feebly beckoned her back.

“Miss Merryan,” he whispered hoarsely, “gin our Kenneth does na gi’e me leave, I will na speak ae word. I ha’e gi’en my promise till him.”

“Yes, yes ; but he will, Adam ; he will.”

“I am no that sure,” answered Adam, with a gleam of his old shrewdness ; “I would na undertake to say.”

“I know he will.”

“Aweel ;” but his thoughts were dropping away again, and he fell to muttering below his breath.

General Douglas was sealing a letter when Marion went to him. “The poor old fellow has set his heart on seeing Kenneth again,” he said ; “but I doubt his lasting so long, myself.”

“Oh, Uncle Norman, Kenneth will come in time.”

Her uncle shook his head.

“This is Tuesday ; you cannot look for him before Friday evening, at earliest.”

Marion’s heart sank. The strain of suspense was hard to endure for so long ; how were those three days to be lived through ? Would he come in time ? would he be too late ?—for ever those two questions. Beyond them she

would not suffer her thoughts to stray. All must be well when he was there ; she would not doubt that. Her one passionate wish was that he should come before Adam died. Spoken by those dying lips, the confession would reach General Douglas's ears at a time when it would be easy for him to comfort the passing soul with words of full forgiveness. It would be Adam's confession, not Kenneth's. That which the son for very love found it too hard to say, would be spoken for him. And on him, after the one shock, would fall the mighty blessing. The burden would be lifted from his life.

Those three days passed ; the watching and the waiting went on. The old man sank rapidly. At times he was roused to full consciousness ; more often his mind wandered far back into the past. He was a soldier again ; the names of long-forgotten comrades were on his lips, and old words of command.

Now and then the General, standing by, would start with a sad half-smile, as he recognized some broken fragment of one of the scenes of his youth. Adam was in the Peninsula—he was fighting—and his captain was always in his thoughts. They heard him speak as if in answer to an order, and saw him trying to stiffen himself into a military salute.

Marion used to look on with a feeling that she was cruel in wishing,—nay willing, him to prolong the fight with death. “A little longer,” was the cry of her heart; “just a little longer.” But would he know Kenneth when he came? They often spoke to him now, and he gave no answer, only rambled on in broken words.

After noon on Friday, however, the sinking powers seemed to rally once again. His voice grew stronger, and he knew all those who came into his room, and spoke to them. “It is the last flicker of the fading lamp,” said General Douglas.”

“He will win awa the nicht,” whispered the nurse, watching him with experienced eyes.

Kenneth would be here in a few hours.

“You have been very good to my poor old Adam, Marion,” her uncle said to her as they were pacing up and down before the Tower. She was watching the lengthening shadows, and she turned with a thrill of remorse.

“Oh, don’t say that, Uncle Norman.”

“Kenneth ought soon to be here,” he continued, taking out his watch; “but he will barely be in time, if he comes at all.”

In another hour they were sent for back to the sick-room. A change had come. General

Douglas took the old man's hand in his. The minister, Angus Maclean, stood at the foot of the bed. Marion knelt down and prayed that all selfish feeling might be taken from her in that solemn hour. No one spoke; no one moved, till the door was quietly opened, and Marion looked up with a start as a hand was put on her shoulder.

Kenneth stood beside her; he was leaning over the sick man. "My dear old Adam," she heard him say gently; "do you know me?"

There was no smile on Adam's face, but an answering look of full recognition.

Marion rose from her knees, and without looking at Kenneth stole noiselessly out of the room. Her uncle followed her in a minute or two. "He wants to see Kenneth 'his lane,'" he said half-smiling. "Poor faithful old fellow; he always loved that boy."

"Uncle Norman," said Marion abruptly, "I am going home."

Kenneth was alone with the dying man. The thought of what was now passing between them made her heart beat to suffocation. Soon they would summon General Douglas, and as if for the first time Marion realized what this would be to him. Hitherto she had only felt that she was fighting a great battle for the

deliverance of Kenneth, and for the cause of truth.

“My child,” she heard her uncle saying anxiously, “how pale you look ; you have worn yourself out, Marion. You are not fit to walk home. Go and wait in the boat, and I will send some one to row you over.”

Marion was beginning to feel strangely weary, and her head swam. She went down, as her uncle told her, to the little boat that was moored near the landing-place, and waited with her face buried in her hands. She hardly knew in the reaction of feeling that was coming over her how the minutes passed. She could not have told whether it was a long or a short time, before she was roused by the sound of footsteps. Kenneth and the General were coming down towards the boat. She saw that they walked slowly, and that the father was leaning on the son’s arm.

Marion raised herself to meet them.

“I have left you a long time, my child,” her uncle said ; “but Kenneth sent for me just after I left you. It is all over, Marion.”

“He is dead ?” she asked.

He bent his head. “A few minutes ago ; very quietly, without a struggle ; but I think he knew me to the last.—And now, Marion, Kenneth shall take you home.”

Marion tried with her dazzled eyes to read their faces. Kenneth looked disturbed and very pale ; his father, grave and sad. He signed to Kenneth, who got into the boat and pushed off from the shore, without saying a word.

The loch lay golden in the setting sun, and purple shadows fell on the eastern hills. Marion was half-lulled, half-confused, by the smooth, gliding motion through the shining water. She could not speak to Kenneth, but sat gazing straight before her.

When they were fairly out in the loch he stopped rowing, and leant forward so as to look into her face : " Marion," he said gently, " it could not be as you wished."

" As I wished," she repeated, in a dull, mechanical way.

" This was no time for explanations. Poor old Haldane !—I think I set his mind at rest upon it."

" He is dead, and he said nothing ; do you mean that ?" asked Marion, speaking in a voice so strained and unlike her own that Kenneth was half frightened.

" Both on my father's account and on his own, it would never have done ; but I am sorry," he added bitterly, " that you should be disappointed."

Marion made no answer, and he sat with his eyes fixed on his oar, watching the bright drops that ran along its edge and dropped into the water.

"I should like to go home," she said presently; and he obeyed without a word.

When they reached the other side Marion got up from her place, steadied herself as she passed him by the hand which he held out to her, and went silently up the bank.

At that moment Kenneth did not dare to follow her.

CHAPTER III.

GOOD INTENTIONS.

“O Marion’s a bounie lass,
And the blyth blinks in her e’e;
And fain wad I marry Marion,
Gin Marion wad marry me.”

It was soon after this that Douglas returned to Dalbraith.

Events followed one another rather quickly just then. Adam Haldane’s funeral was barely over before General Douglas received that letter from Ronald which made him hurry up to London to meet him.

Kenneth departed with his father, for just now Dalbraith was scarcely a satisfactory place to him; so he went off to join a brother-officer’s yacht at Oban, intending to return home for the last bit of his leave, by which time he hoped that Marion would have got over the first bitterness of her disappointment.

As yet she could not bear it to be spoken of; she avoided Kenneth, and went wandering

away alone on the hills, or sat looking idly across the loch, while her thoughts went and came like ships upon the sea. The downfall of her hopes left her almost stunned for the time, though her nature was too brave and too healthy to remain long crushed under this ruin of her dreams.

Kenneth would fain have talked it over after his fashion. He wanted to reason with her about it, but she shrank back. The pain was still too new—her faith in him had suffered shipwreck—she could only keep aloof from him, so he went away.

And then began a new scene in the poor little drama of her life—a new scene that had in it a half-comic element of misunderstandings.

General Douglas came home full of Ronald. He could talk of nothing else; and it was natural that Marion should listen eagerly to everything she could hear about him, since her hopes had ebbed so low that her best comfort was in trying to believe that, after all, the harm done to him was not so great as she had feared.

But the moment he came home she saw that his history was printed on his face, in characters, however, that were rather hard to decipher; for though his expression was very

melancholy, it was not with that weak sadness that needs or asks for sympathy.

The frank, impetuous, confiding nature had been taught self-dependence in a harsh school ; but, at whatever cost, the lesson had been learnt, and Ronald knew how to live alone. Further than that it was difficult for any one to see. Marion in vain watched for the brightening of his face ; it seldom grew soft, and the smile that had in it a curious charm, telling both of strength and sweetness, was seldom seen.

She liked his face best, she thought, when Grizel was making some of her untoward speeches ; his downward look at her, with its gleam of amusement, seemed to Marion full of the patient, protecting indulgence that the strong accord the weak.

Ronald often said quaint, half-mocking things—the quaintest and the least serious, Marion found out, when he was most in earnest. But, after all, how little she knew of him !—a grave reserve—a rare winning smile—a queer trick of speech ; these are not very distinctive characteristics. As yet, she knew nothing more.

It was, perhaps, not very strange that General Douglas misunderstood Marion's interest in her cousin. He loved her for it. Any woman might well care for such an one as Ronald.

He longed to bless her and thank her ; and every time her shy, earnest manner confirmed his hopes, he thought her more womanly and sweet. She could scarcely have been the Marion she was—true, and tender, and noble—if the pity she must needs feel for Douglas had not grown into something that was more than “akin to love.”

Poor Marion was utterly unconscious of all her uncle’s visions. Too simple and humble to think about herself at all, she was only occupied with hopes and fears for the others ; and, as she slowly recovered from the shock she had received, she longed more than ever to be given some work of help, however small, to do.

And so the game of cross-purposes went on very quietly for a time. Then, suddenly, Ronald’s manner changed. The kind look and tone that she used to think belonged to Grizel was given to her now—without the amused gleam. He came often to talk with her in his grave and gentle way, and seemed to care about making her tell him her thoughts in return.

Marion was as slow and stupid as possible, poor child, about understanding it all. Ronald’s love-making was certainly not of the ordinary type. It seemed to her only natural to be friendly with him, and rather unkind of Uncle

Norman to be ready to jump down Grizzly's throat on all occasions. It was his irrepressible anxiety and restlessness that first enlightened her. Any looker-on must have been amused at his little manœuvres—the eagerness with which he strove to show off his nephew in a good light—his devoted manner to Marion—the atmosphere of stern suspicion with which he surrounded Grizel. Lady Beatrix, who never could resist the funny side of things, tried vainly to look grave; but she, too, was on her good behaviour with the General, and, withal, was very anxious about her granddaughter.

The awakening came to Marion at last—she could scarcely have told by what means. General Douglas was so often with Lady Beatrix, and she noticed that their earnest talk ceased abruptly when she came into the room. Then, one day, Ronald came himself; and after he was gone she saw that Granny had been crying. Besides, as he left the house, Ronald met her, and took her hand—and after that she knew.

“Marion,” said Lady Beatrix.

They were alone together, and the girl sat on a low stool, her hands clasped over her grandmother's knee. She had been silent for some time; and Lady Beatrix, supposing she

guessed her thoughts, had not disturbed her. There was an undefined feeling of tender pity for the child in her heart, though she believed that Marion was lost in happy dreams. Still it seemed to her almost sad to see the great realities of life throw their shadows for the first time across the youth which she fancied had been so entirely free from care.

She would have wondered if she could have read the thoughts that filled Marion's mind, and weighed so heavily on the head that was resting on her grandmother's lap. She stroked the fair hair lovingly.

"My child thinks it all very bright," she said to herself; "but, O! God guard her, for it is the strong light that casts the shadows."

And Marion, in her lofty ignorance, was thinking, "It does not matter if I am very happy or not—happiness is not everything—if only I am ready when the call comes to me."

She could hardly have told if this was joy or sorrow, so unlike was it to any of her dreams. It was not thus she had hoped to be of service to Ronald. At first she felt nothing but utter surprise at the thought that she could be anything to him. She could hardly believe it yet; but if it were so, she did not hesitate, nor did she guess why there was a sort of drawing-

back in the bottom of her heart. It was in this strange, unlooked-for way that she was to make that atonement for Kenneth's sin to which she had vowed her life.

• "My little Moll," said Lady Beatrix, "I am going to make Uncle Norman very angry."

"You, Granny?" Marion woke up with a short laugh of amusement and disbelief.

"Yes; Norman will be angry. He is very strict with us all just now; but I must take care of my child first of all. I will not have her taken by surprise. Marion," she continued, very softly, "there is something coming to you. You have guessed?"

"I wondered what Uncle Norman said to you," said Marion.

"And you guessed?"

"Granny, tell me."

"My little Moll,"—she sunk her voice still lower; "they want you to make poor Ronald happy."

"Does Uncle Norman want it?" whispered Marion back.

"Uncle Norman wants it—and, my darling, so does Ronald."

"Granny," said Marion, in a serious, earnest tone, "are you sure that Ronald does?"

Lady Beatrix laughed a little.

“Granny, you must not laugh. Does Ronald really?”

“Yes, my poor little Moll. Ronald really does.”

The colour deepened a little in the girl's cheeks; she sat gravely considering.

“But, Marion,” continued her grandmother, “we must think first of what is right.”

“Yes, Granny,” very earnestly.

“There are stories—true stories, alas!—against poor Ronald. They frighten me for you.”

“For me?” Marion looked as if she did not quite understand.

“My child, if you should not be happy or safe with him.”

“Oh! is that all?” said Marion.

“Ah! you think that now—you think you cannot help being happy with Ronald—but listen. Things have been very hard on him; he has had a sorrowful life in many ways;”—Marion clasped her hands tightly together—“he has been tempted, and he has failed. Those who are wise and prudent would say he is not to be trusted.”

Marion raised her head; the light was coming to her.

“Child, how shall I answer for you to your father?”

“Uncle Norman—” began Marion.

“Uncle Norman can only think of what is good for Ronald,” and once more the girl’s face brightened.

“You must consider a great deal, Marion, and pray, and try to be very wise; that is why I told you.” Her hand shook as she still stroked her grandchild’s hair, and Marion took it in both of hers and kissed it.

“Ronald came to me to-day,” resumed Lady Beatrix, presently; “Norman sent him. He was very good, very generous, very patient; he let me say everything I wished. He did not excuse himself; he spoke harshly of no one, and very tenderly of his mother; but—he wants you, Marion.”

Marion gave a little sobbing sigh.

“And I know I ought to have been firmer with him, and said more severe things, for he has failed; we must not forget that. But all he said was so touching. Poor dear boy, it made my heart ache to think of that melancholy home, and his poor mother.”

“What did you say to him, Granny?”

Granny looked down, and seemed quite ashamed of herself.

“Oh, child! I think—I am afraid—I was so

sorry for him. I am afraid I said—almost what you will say.”

It was only a few days after this, that General Douglas broke in ruthlessly on poor Grizel’s dissertation about Tibbie MacMichael’s prospects. When she had been hurried out *nolens volens* to see the sunset, Marion’s first impulse was to follow her as quickly as she could, but Ronald had come to her side, and as she tried to rise, he laid his hand heavily on hers.

“Marion,” he said, and for the first time since he had been at home there was something in his look and voice that reminded her of the boy Ronald, something that was half fun, half tenderness. “Do you want to hear some more about young Morison?”

“N—no,” she answered, doubtfully.

He knelt down on one knee beside her, and his face and tone changed suddenly, as he said, “Then will you listen to me now?”

Out of doors, in the glow of that sunset which the General professed so greatly to admire, the unsuspecting Grizel was telling one of her most effective stories. Norman had artfully beguiled her (without much difficulty, it may be) into beginning it.

True, they both knew it by heart, and had

fought tooth and nail many a time, over their separate versions of it, but to-day he manifested a meek, believing spirit, and an unwonted desire for information.

Grizel launched out into new and utterly incredible details. "Very curious indeed," was murmured by her hearer in a tone of profound conviction.

It threw poor Grizel quite out. She stammered, and stopped when she came to the place where the challenge ought to have broken in, lost the thread of her discourse, and finally brought the story to a lame and impotent conclusion.

However, it had served its turn.

Half an hour ; only half an hour, and yet how everything had changed for Douglas and Marion ! A short time, and but few words spoken, and such very simple ones, but strong words and true.

"You do trust me?" he had asked. "You are not afraid?" And when she answered, "Indeed I trust you," he held out his hand, and clasped hers with a strong close grasp. "Thank you ; God helping me," he said, "I believe you may."

And then he added simply, "It is tremendously good of you, Marion. It makes me so very happy."

It was Grizel, of course, who came blundering in on them first, with a summons to Marion to come out and see the "bonnie golden clouds," but it must be confessed that the General was not far behind her, and that he was eager—under the cover of Grizel's indiscretion—to satisfy the curiosity he could no longer conveniently resist.

The two were standing together in the window, and both said "Granny," and came quickly forward to meet Lady Beatrix.

Grizel subsided against the wall, simply breathless with amazement, and only just able to gasp out, "Preserve us all!—and I who saw it from the first!"

The little room with the prim pictures looking down seemed in a moment to be filled to overflowing with rejoicing. "Euphemia Douglas, spinster, ætat 45," would have been edified by the ceremonious "salute" of congratulation and sympathy that was exchanged forthwith, between Cousin Norman and Cousin Grizel. And then they stood quietly aside, while Granny, with the air of old-world dignity that she knew so well how to assume, signed to the young pair to kneel before her, and standing very erect, like the little patriarch she was, she laid one hand on the fair head, the other on the dark, and bade God "bless the bairns."

The next day Ronald took Marion to his mother. There was no formal, loving little ceremony at Dalbraith. Lady Douglas asked to see the girl alone, so her son only went with his betrothed as far as the door of the room, which she entered by herself. There was something rather sad in leaving him outside; but Margaret was very kind. She kissed and welcomed her future daughter, and then she held Marion's hand and stood silently looking at her with those large dark eyes, that had never lost their steady intensity of gaze. "I am glad you love him, Marion," she said. "It is the best thing in all the world for him."

Marion was tremulous with shyness, and with the longing she did not know how to express, that she might be allowed to be something to Ronald's mother. But while she was trying to find words Lady Douglas turned quietly away, and opened the drawer of a cabinet near her. She presently came back to Marion with a quaint old jewel in her hand, that was fashioned like a heart, and attached to a curiously-wrought gold chain. "It is very old," she said, "and they say it belonged once to Queen Mary. My husband gave it to me before I was married, and now I think he would like it to belong to you;" and she fastened it round the girl's throat.

It was a curious old jewel certainly, and the act was a gracious one, but somehow it checked Marion's words, and brought the tears into her eyes. She could only say "Thank you," and kiss the hand that clasped the chain round her neck. "And now go back to Douglas," said Margaret, gently pushing her towards the door.

Ronald was leaning against the wall, waiting for her, and he started from rather a despondent attitude to come and meet her.

They went and stood in the window, both silent, till he said with a wistful sort of smile, "I am sure mother was glad."

"Oh, I hope so, I think so," answered Marion.

He hesitated a moment, and then added, "She did not ask for me, I suppose?"

"No," Marion was obliged to say; and she put her hand on his arm.

He moved his head with a quick, slight gesture, that she did not know how to interpret, and then he asked her to go out with him.

Lady Beatrix had laid only one condition upon Douglas, and that was, that the marriage was not to be announced to any one until Marion's father came himself, to confirm the consent she had given.

Nobody minded this, except that Grizel mourned over the letter she should not now be

able to write to Dullsmuir, imparting the great news. It would have been so gratifying to all there, and 'dear Jane' had written off to her the moment she perceived anything 'particular' in Archibald Morison's manner. However, it was not to be. Margaret's brother, Lord Sandysmere, was to be told of course, when he came to Dalbraith, but no one else, "excepting Kenneth," as General Douglas said, patting Marion's hand.

For the last year or two the Dalbraith forest and moors had been taken by Lord Sandysmere, to the satisfaction of gillies and foresters, who felt that the old place had at least, in some sort, fallen back into the hands of the family.

It was a good thing too, for Margaret, to have her brother with her, for though his headquarters were at the shooting-lodge in the hills up north, he passed a good deal of his time at Dalbraith. His influence over his sister had been very strong at one time, and his affection for her was unfailing.

Lord Sandysmere was one of those people who are greatly beloved by their families, and by their own chosen circle of intimate friends, and are entirely different in their behaviour to them and to every one outside. To his own belongings he was affectionate, kindly, keenly interested in all that concerned them, and

though rather critical, generally indulgent in his judgment. To the world at large he was sarcastic, indifferent, and quietly unapproachable.

Much had been expected of him in his youth. People said he was quite certain to distinguish himself, but time slipped on, and the predictions were not verified. Perhaps he did not care much for success ; perhaps he had never found any object that he thought worth fighting for.

Margaret possessed more of his confidence than any one in the world, and in a good-humoured off-hand way of his own, he often astonished her by home truths about herself, that no one else would have dreamt of telling her.

"Yes," he said to her one day ; "there has been a screw loose somewhere in both your life and mine. They have both of them been failures more or less."

"There was a part of mine," she said in a low voice, "that no one could have called a failure."

"I wasn't questioning whether we had been happy or not. I only said that from different causes, you and I have wasted our lives."

"Have you wasted yours, Harold ?"

"To be sure I have. Can you ask ? I have let mine drift. I did not come to any great crash, but I let the chances slip by, one by one. You don't suppose my life now is what I meant it to be, do you ?"

"I have wondered sometimes why you did not do more."

"Simply because I am lazy and ignorant, my dear," he said. "It's no good going back upon it, but no one knows better than I do why I failed. I waited a little too long, that was all."

"One may try," she said, "and fail."

"I don't call it failing if you have done your best; but then, you see, I never have done my best. No more have you, Meg."

His sister opened her eyes, and stared at him as if thunderstruck. "Harold!"

He laughed, and patted her shoulder. "My poor dear, after all, you have always been a spoilt child."

Once again she looked at him. "I think you must be going out of your mind," she said deliberately.

"No; I really mean it. Look at your son, Margaret. I don't say he is not a very fine fellow, but do you think you have made him all that nature intended him to be?"

Lord Sandysmere did not wait for an answer, nor did Margaret try to give him one. He leant back in his arm-chair, and buried himself in the *Times*, quite unconscious of the odd effect his words produced on one who was only used to the chivalrous compassion of Norman Douglas, and to Grizel's unquestioning adoration.

He liked sunshine, and was fond of seeing happy faces round him, and he never ceased regretting the old light-hearted frankness that used to make Ronald such good company when he was a boy. He could hardly forgive his sister for letting her own gloom throw a shadow over her son's whole life.

"It is not right," he used to say impatiently. "We were not meant to be for ever looking back. Why don't you share his interests more?"

"Douglas has got Marion," Lady Douglas once answered; "he does not need me now."

"That is the most womanly, motherly, jealous, natural speech I ever heard you make, Meg; I shall begin to have some hopes of you." But Margaret shook her head.

Douglas and Marion were too grave a pair of lovers to please Lord Sandysmere. It was the only fault he had to find with them. He delighted in Marion's hardy Highland ways, and in her strength and fearlessness.

Sometimes he made her walk for miles with him when he was shooting on the moors, and then he used to explain to her what a pity it was that she and Ronald took life so seriously. Marion listened and smiled. She could not tell him half the reasons that made life seem to her

a very serious thing. No one knew as well as she did what had made it so for Ronald, and the more she learnt of his strong and loyal nature, of his generous patience, and the entire child-like trust he had given to herself, the more Marion looked upon his love as a solemn charge that had been given to her to keep.

One day she walked up the glen with Lady Douglas to the water-fall. Ronald and his uncle had gone off for a week on a fishing expedition, and they were alone. Margaret was fond of the falls, especially when they had been swollen by heavier rains than usual, and just now, after many wet days, they were at the acme of their turbulent glory. She sat down on a rock at the foot of the craigs, and gazed silently before her, quite indifferent to the cloud of spray, that a fitful puff of air blew over her now and then.

It was a sight that fascinated her. Above the steady onward rush of the narrowing river, through the cleft over which the cliffs bent on either side as if watching for its fall; the wild leap where the rocks broke suddenly away; the downward flash, and then the crashing tumble into the basin that seethed and boiled beneath; the shivered waves; the tossed wreaths of foam; sheets of water like whirling

snow-storms; straight, falling lines of black, brown, green water, dashed down on to the rocks; rainbow showers blown against the trees; ferns glistening with water-sparks; the loud voices of the thundering waters—and yet with it all a grand monotony. For ever the same rush and fall and roar, the same trembling of the heath-bells on the shaken bank.

Marion left Lady Douglas to watch the falls undisturbed, and wandered further down the glen. It was a quiet evening, grey and soft, that was set like a pearl among the diamonds of the summer. Presently she saw that a man was coming up rapidly from below, in and out among the trees, and across the burn. He was hidden from her for a time by the shoulder of the hill, but she had already recognised Kenneth. Marion knew that his father was expecting him that day, and she was not much surprised at seeing him. Kenneth would scarcely be at home for long, without hearing from some of them of her engagement to Ronald, and she felt sure that his first impulse would be to come to her. All the afternoon the thought of seeing him had been before her. Now she went a few steps to meet him, and then stopped under the shadow of a great lichen-covered rock, one side of which was all

blackened and polished by the chafing of the stream. It rose between her and Lady Douglas, so that Kenneth thought at first that Marion was alone.

She said, "Kenneth," and held out her hand as he came up, and he spoke also, but both their voices were drowned by the thunder of the falls. He signed to her to go with him, and still grasping her hand drew her away from the burly-burly of sound. As soon as they had got far enough away to hear each other speak, he dropped her hand, and said roughly—"Is this true which I have heard?"

"Who told you?" asked Marion, with an instinctive wish to delay her answer.

"What does it matter who told me? Why, all of them. It was the first thing I heard; but it isn't true, is it? I didn't believe it, Marion."

She did not speak.

"It isn't true?" he said again. "It can't be true that you have promised to marry Ronald? I wish you would answer. You have?—Marion, was that your revenge?"

"Revenge?"

"Revenge—because I could not do as you wished the other day. Was it for that?"

"Kenneth, you do not know what you are saying."

“Yes, yes, I do; and you know as well as I do what I mean. So this is to be the end! Ronald!—what does Ronald care for you, or you for Ronald?”

Marion turned round and faced him, looking up at him with eyes that forced him to meet hers in return.

“Kenneth,” she said quietly, “you know best—do we owe nothing to Ronald, you and I? Is it for us to deny him anything he asks?”

He took a sudden step backwards. “Good heavens!” he said, in a low, changed voice, “have you done it for that?”

Every one of Kenneth’s moods came upon Marion unexpectedly. When she hoped that he would yield, he was as hard as adamant; but when she looked for a burst of anger, he was gentle and reasonable. He stood still now, looking on the ground, his face full of intense thought, as if for the first time the full understanding of some truth had burst upon him.

“Have you thought of it as seriously as that?” he said at last. “I never quite understood it before. Marion, must you atone with such a price as that?” His tone was one of awe-struck and quiet wonder.

“I do not understand what you mean well enough to answer you,” she said; “I only know that when I see what Ronald’s life has been, it seems to me that nothing in all the world that I can do, will ever be enough to make up to him for what he has gone through. He thinks I can make his life happier. I pray God to give me such grace and such love as to fulfil his hope, and to be worthy of his trust and of his love for me.”

The colour flushed into her cheeks; she raised her eyes; a look of intense longing, sweetness, and tenderness lit up all her face. There is a theory (perhaps it is a very fanciful one), that rare moments come in every life when the Divine Spirit reigns in the soul with such supremacy, that the face wears that heavenly look which shall belong to it hereafter, and appears for a brief lightning space as it will shine when this mortal shall have put on immortality. Such a look was on Marion’s face now.

For the moment—only for the moment—the fire of her enthusiasm caught the smouldering embers of that higher nature that Kenneth had done much to extinguish. He looked up at Marion standing straight and resolute under the huge rock, a grey plaid wound round her

slight figure, her hand resting on the rough head which the big deer-hound Lufra had thrust under it. His wise, patient face, gazing gravely at the young man, had almost caught the shadow of his mistress's steadfast look. She seemed to draw Kenneth up into some higher region.

"I see," he said in a low voice, "you are right, Marion." And at that moment Lady Douglas came slowly forward from behind the rock which had hidden her from them hitherto. It so chanced that Kenneth had never seen her since her husband's death. It had been partly accident, partly design on his part, that had kept him out of her way during his late visits to Dalbraith. He had always dreaded seeing her, and his last memory of her was in the full tide of her happiness.

Now he looked at this tall, black-robed woman almost as at a stranger, with her quenched beauty, her sunken eyes and grey hair, her still, set face. He thought it would have been almost less dreadful if she had shown any emotion at seeing him, but it was nothing to her. She had even forgotten how long it was since they last met, and she held out her hand with a smile—that smile which people said was the saddest thing about her.

Marion saw how moved and struck he was, as he silently took her hand, but Lady Douglas did not notice it.

Kenneth had his own creed—a very wild and erratic one, it is true—of generosity and honour. He tried to keep to it, but its rules were vague—the trumpet to which he hearkened gave out an uncertain sound. By this standard he now perceived that he had no right to come between Douglas and Marion. He had—innocently as he had really brought himself to believe—done his cousin a grievous injury. He could atone, and more than atone now, by leaving to him the wife whom he had chosen.

As, on the night of his return, he paced up and down under the windows of the tower, on the little terrace that rose out of the loch, he tried to reason out the question calmly, and to do battle with the fierce longing he felt to go and claim Marion before them all; to summon her away from Ronald, and take possession of the first place in her heart, which belonged to him of right—which had been his since they were children.

What was Ronald to her then?—what ties bound those two together? Marion had belonged to him ever since her father sent her home as a tiny child from India. He never

doubted that she loved him. He loved her with all the strength that a selfish man can put into his love ; but, perhaps, he had never cared for her so passionately as now that another man had stepped in and won her away from him.

Until lately his affection had been a part of himself indeed, but a part so long established and so deeply rooted that he did not give very much thought to its existence. Before he met Marion in London, he thought of her as a piece of property of his own, sweet and precious, it is true, but that would wait until it suited him to go and take possession of it.

There was nothing in the world half so near and dear to him ; but for a time other interests had been very absorbing, and besides, the image of Marion was mixed up with a bit of his history which he did not like to be reminded of. He had even felt a little unwillingness to face her, and some fear of what she would say to him.

Their meeting in London startled him wonderfully. Marion, in her young, strong, fair womanliness, was not the child who used to see only through his eyes. This new Marion had thought, judged, decided for herself. She met him with a grave composure, and seemed to hold herself apart from him. And then—

perhaps to one of Kenneth's nature that was the finishing-stroke—others seemed to value and admire her.

To do him justice, however, jealousy did not count for much. He fell honestly and deeply in love directly he saw the dear, well-remembered face again. That night he went home full of pain, and aching disappointment, and wounded love—and when he saw Marion again next day the feeling only deepened. His old half-brotherly, half-patronising affection was gone for ever—and instead there had risen in his heart a deep, restless, passionate love.

And now he was to give her up—to stand tamely by and see Ronald take the place which he felt belonged to him—Ronald whom he had injured, and therefore did not love.

It was fearfully hard. Would the day ever come when Marion would care most for that other man in whose cause she spoke so eagerly to-day? Kenneth crushed his heel down on the gravel savagely. He looked across the loch, slumbering in the arms of the encircling hills, and hated it for its peacefulness, for the perfect calm that was only broken now and again by a soft breath of air, beneath which it rose and sunk with the gentle breathing of a child asleep.

He thought suddenly of the same scene in autumn, all brown and sere, with black rain lashing the cold water, and blasts laden with hail rushing down every gully in the rocks, to howl in gusts among the tossing trees. To-night only a hushed murmur passed through the branches of the firs. There was absolutely no sound of human life, but somewhere beyond the hills, a long way up the glen, a sheep-dog barked.

The distant melancholy bark brought the thought of Lufra before Kenneth; and with that, a vivid picture, almost a vision, of Marion standing near him in the moonlight, with her grey dress and shining eyes.

Lady Beatrix, and Marion, and Grizel were together at the Lady's Lodge next day, when Kenneth came to see them with his father. Marion had been afraid to see him again after their stormy meeting and silent parting yesterday. She was sorry for him, and with the singular quick sympathy that there had always been between them, she knew exactly how he shrank from his father's cheery manner and Grizel's effusive greetings.

"For we got but half a sight of you yesterday, Granny and I. He wasn't to hold or to bind, General, after he had gotten the great news,

but was off to give Marion joy. Were you greatly surprised, Kenneth, when you heard it? I was—but to be sure they tell me I haven't the gift to see what will be going on under my very nose. Still, I might have known better," she added mysteriously—"there were signs," and she nodded her head.

"Aye, signs; were there, Grizel?" asked the General in a patronising way.

"There were some as saw Marion standing at his left hand that very day—and we all know what that betokens—and other circumstances which we will not enter into now, for it is well-known that the General is no true Highlander in regard to the second sight and the like," ended Grizel, with great dignity.

"I don't know that," said the General, greatly flattered at being supposed to be above all "worn-out superstition and nonsense," "I don't know that, my good friend."

"Ah, well; those that know most say least," continued Grizel, who was beginning to mount her hobby—"but it was no later back than just a month before the late dear Lord came by his death, that old Niel M'Dougall saw him with his own eyes—and his shroud"—

"Cousin Grizel, don't," interrupted Marion.

"Then I won't, my dear; and it wasn't

becoming indeed to talk of such like things and of your troth-plight in one and the same breath. We'll just shift the conversation to some subject that will be more diverting—this fearsome war in the Crimea, and Kenneth getting his wound in the trenches. Will ye have to go back, Kenneth, to Sebastopol?"

"I hope so, if the war does not come to an end," said Kenneth, smiling.

"There is a conundrum I had in my mind to ask both you and Ronald. You were aye fond of riddles when you were a laddie, Kenneth, do you mind? and very quick at finding them out. I never could think on the answer to one in all my life, though I am very partial to them too. Dear, dear, what was this one? I got it off by heart, and very comical it was. My patience! it was concerning a bit of news and a big gun—that's what made me think of it for you—a bit of news first, as it might be this about Douglas and Marion—and a big gun—'a great discharge;' no that wouldn't be it—or a false report—but that won't do either, because it was no false report, was it, Kenneth, about dear Marion?"

"It seems not," said Kenneth gravely.

"And hasn't our Marion grown up good and bonnie, Kenneth—worthy even of Ronald? You

must have wondered to see her grown so tall and fair, and her figure so jimp and small, and her sweet smile. You know they call her the Lily of Dalbraith."

"I do not wonder," answered Kenneth. He was very quiet to-day, courteous and kind to Grizel, and specially loving to Lady Beatrix.

By-and-by, when he had an opportunity of being alone with Marion, he came up to her and took her hand. "Marion," he said gently—"would you like me to go away?"

"From Dalbraith, Kenneth? no!" she answered quickly, the tears coming into her eyes.

"I understand better now what you are doing," he went on; "and I should like to help you, dear, if I could."

"Then stay, Kenneth, and be my brother, as you were in the dear old days."

"Ah," he said with a half-smile, "but the old days are 'lang syne,' Marion."

She looked up at him standing there with a sad look in his beautiful hazel eyes, and she could not but recall the "yellow-haired laddie" whom she had loved so dearly, and whose scrapes and secrets she had shared with so much enthusiasm. There in the old place, just as when they were children, and now he was asking her if he ought to go away!

Truly there are knots fastened in childhood that are very hard to loose—sometimes they cannot be untied, but must be broken, and other things are broken too along with them.

CHAPTER IV.

“AUF WIEDERSEHEN.”

“But had I wist, before I kiss’d,
That love had been so hard to win,
I’d lock’d my heart in a case o’ gold,
And pinn’d it wi’ a siller pin.”

AN English lane,—warm, sunny, and turf-bordered, and with its hawthorn hedges in full bloom.

A Sunday afternoon in spring—late spring—real spring—when the gorse is a golden glory, and the east wind of many past weeks but a bitter memory.

Two or three children in the grassy lane—some dogs—great horse-chestnut trees peeping over a mossy park-paling, and filling the air with the fragrance of their pink and white plumes of blossom—a bank, starred sparsely with late primroses. Drawn up at the side of the lane, with one wheel almost over among the daffodils and blue-bells in the ditch, is a garden-chair, dragged by a donkey, whose

nose is just now buried in a milk-white hawthorn-tree with trailing branches, too pure and dainty surely for a donkey's dinner. Lady Beatrix Stuart, as she sits in her little chariot, is so surrounded by heaped-up boughs of broom and May-flower, chestnut-blossom and lilac, that they call her the Queen of the May.

There has been a party at Sandysmere for Easter, but the guests have nearly all departed now. Those who remain for one more country Sunday have met in the lane this afternoon, some on their way home from church—others gathering spring-spoils by bunches and armsful, for just now trees and hedges are not trees and hedges only, but piles of blossom.

Lord Sandysmere is distracting the donkey's mind from his blackthorn by tempting young bramble-shoots. Kenneth Douglas leans against the wheel, and absently pulls the unopened buds off a dog-rose-bush in the hedge. Agénor de Beaurepaire is pensively gathering forget-me-nots. General Douglas with his hat held in his hand stands at a gate and looks into the park, up the shining green aisle of a great avenue; a little way behind the rest Douglas and Marion are slowly coming over the grass under the white shadow of the hawthorn-hedge.

Presently from the far end of the lane appear another couple, trudging along on opposite sides of the road—a young man and a girl, both in their Sunday best, and bearing nosegays of cowslips—silent and apart, but evidently on the best of terms. The girl looks stolidly before her as she drops a curtsey to the party round the garden-chair, her escort blushes, and responds with gruff bashfulness to the universal “Good evening.”

“Lovers’ Lane,” says Lord Sandysmere to Kenneth, as the two couples pass and greet each other. Kenneth does not answer, but goes to the donkey’s head, and rouses poor Jack rather roughly out of his dream of drowsy bliss and brambles.

And so the little cavalcade moved on. Sir Charles Stuart, who had been telling stories to the children, Lord Sandysmere’s nieces, came back and walked beside his mother, holding the hand which she held out to him. He was always affectionate and even demonstrative in his manner to her, though to every one else he was the cheeriest and the least sentimental of human beings. Now too, the shadow of a coming parting was between them, for a few weeks ago he had received his appointment somewhat earlier than he expected, to a high military command in India. It was to see the last of

him that Lady Beatrix and Marion were again in England.

His mother possessed the one soft spot in his heart, the rest of it perhaps, had grown a little hard during his homeless foreign life, but he was a very good-natured man, cautious and prudent, hard to influence, and tolerably confident in the superiority of his own judgment. This had been abundantly proved to all his belongings, when he came to Dalbraith after the betrothal of Ronald and his daughter. His consent had been waited for, but that he should give it unconditionally, was considered a simple matter of certainty.

He came—heard the story from his mother, who tried to tell it, gambling debts and all, with laboured impartiality, talked things over with General Douglas, and took a long walk over the moors with the young man himself, after which he announced to the dismay of all concerned, that he would sanction no formal engagement till after a year's probation.

He bore himself with unfailing good humour and patience through the storm of entreaties, and remonstrances, and reproaches that assailed him on all sides; the ground he took up was very simple. He was Marion's father and was bound to do what he thought best for her.

No other view of the case in any way concerned him. He liked Douglas much, and was sorry for him, and he would probably make an excellent husband, but it was better to run no risks. The young man must pay the penalty of his own folly, and if his love would not stand the test of a year's waiting, why it was not love that was worth much.

“But to marry early would be the saving of Ronald,” remonstrated General Douglas, to whom that fact seemed the conclusion of the whole matter.

“That may be,” responded his imperturbable cousin; “but I am Marion's father, not his.”

“You don't put yourself in my poor boy's place, Charley,” said the uncle.

“On the contrary, I try to put myself into my girl's, as well as I can,” replied the father.

“Ronald will just go to his ruin.”

“Then what an escape for Marion!”

“You only attempt to see one side.”

“Just that. Don't let us quarrel, Norman. I think young Douglas seems a fine fellow—”

“Only you don't choose to hold out your hand to save him.”

“It is my business to save Marion.”

“Nonsense; the child would be as safe with

him"—and the General stopped with a swelling heart.

"A year hence we will hope she may."

"Ah, Charley, you don't know what that young fellow's life has been."

"I have seen a good deal of young fellows' lives in my time, my dear Norman, and so have you, only this one has got on your blind side."

"I know what he is. I know him for a true and honourable gentleman. I trust him as I would myself."

"But you think being on his trial for a twelvemonth will be the ruin of him. Come, Norman, I think better of him than you do. He shall have Marion in another year if he behaves himself. I cannot speak more fairly than that?"

"You can not prevent their feeling pledged to one another."

"I can't help their feelings, but I can break their pledges if it is necessary."

General Douglas walked away—all this was very bitter to him. He scorned to plead for Ronald any further—his very urgency was twisted into a confession of weakness, and what power had he to bring before his cousin's practical mind the intensity of his own hopes

and fears. It was hard on Ronald that the home happiness he so much needed had been placed within his reach only to be snatched away again, by what seemed to him a dogged, unreasonable, needless opposition. All this galled the proud old uncle; and then—he was not much used to having his will so strongly overruled, and he did not relish it.

Other people fared no better than he did. Sir Charles argued the case good-humouredly with Grizel, silenced Granny by kissing her hand, and begging her not to give him the pain of refusing a request of hers, and when Lady Douglas came to him herself to plead her son's cause, he treated her as a fond, blind mother who would as a matter of course try to get the moon for her boy if he cried for it.

“After all it is not worth talking of,” he said. “What is a year? It will be over before the young people have time to look about them.”

Neither Douglas nor Marion thought so.

“Father, if you could change your mind,” said Marion, standing before him with downcast eyes and cheeks that were crimsoned with earnestness.

“I can't do that, lassie; but I will listen to anything you want to say.”

The words were encouraging, the tone showed no symptoms of wavering—and after all what was it she wished to tell him? How could she express to this father, who was also nearly a stranger, the doubts that she was only dimly conscious of herself—or explain how she dreaded the prolonging of this struggle for another year, and her craving for the calmness that comes with certainty.

“It would be better for Ronald,” she said in a low voice.

“Granted—and how about yourself?”

Marion hesitated—she could never speak anything but the truth. “Father,” she said, “I am afraid—and tired.”

“Tired?” he echoed quickly—“and afraid! Why and wherefore? Tell me; I sometimes think we have not got to the bottom of all this.”

“Ronald trusts me too much!” she answered. “I am afraid of not being half as good and strong as he thinks I am. A year seems so very long to wait, before I can be sure he will not be disappointed in me.”

Her father patted her cheek with a look of relief. “Is that all? I began to think I had better break off the marriage altogether, if you were frightened and tired of it already.”

“Oh father!” exclaimed Marion in a panic. This last threat silenced her altogether, though she was not sure that she had spoken “the whole truth” in trying to speak “nothing but the truth.”

There was no one to whom she ought to tell all that was in her mind—no one who would understand how the very depth of Ronald’s trust and reverence for her, made her tremble. She saw that he clung to her as if she was his one hope against himself—the anchor that alone could hold him safe—the spell to soothe the stormy restlessness which it needed all the force of his will to keep down. Was she sufficient for these things?—she who knew herself to be so much weaker than other people thought her.

Ronald himself accepted his probation in silence, with proud acquiescence in its justice, and with a grave patience.

“It is so much the worse for me, Marion, but”—and he took her hand—“whatever comes I know that you will be leal and true.”

“Oh Ronald! do not trust me too much!”

“It will be a bad day for me on which I lose a grain of my faith in you,” he answered quietly.

And she must wait a year before one irrevocable step set her free from her own doubts!

And so the winter came, with its storms and snows, and its sombre grandeur.

To Ronald and Marion these months were the happiest they had known for a long while. The wildness of the season brought something of the exhilaration of adventure into their daily lives. The hours of noonday darkness—the solemn nights, brilliant with the witchery of northern lights—the rushing clouds rolled along by stormy winds—the abrupt gorgeous changes of colouring in the skies—all these fell in with Ronald's mood.

The stalking season too was over, and now it seemed to him as if his snowy glens and frost-bound hills belonged to him once more.

“Ronald is just like a bottled wasp as long as the shooting is going on,” said Grizel.

In all these years he had not for a moment swerved from or repented his boyish vow never to touch a gun, but at times it made Dalbraith almost unbearable to him.

Born and bred a mountaineer, the instincts of a sportsman were too strongly rooted in him to be torn up by one shock.

He could not help a desperate longing after the old wild sport—that most natural outlet for the fiery energy of his nature. For a year or two he had gone out deer-

stalking with his father, and the memory of those days of keen delight were as intense and fresh as if they were of yesterday. He was angry with himself that it should be so, but when, as sometimes happened, Lord Sandysmere started from Dalbraith for a distant beat, by the starlight of an October morning, Ronald used to lie awake listening to the sounds of the departure, with strained ears and widely-open eyes, before which one picture stood out with singular pertinacity.

It was a picture that was made up of black wildness and grey desolation. Evening—with the mist curling and floating thickly round some dark rocks that formed a mountain-top—steep barren heights, for it was above the reach of any vegetation, except some brown fern round a giddy ledge that hung over a chasm. And among the fern above the dry bed of a winding torrent, a group of deer.

He and his father had had a hard day's work, and this was its reward. He remembered how his heart beat when Lord Douglas's rifle was raised, and how he heard Fergus's hurried breathing, and then a volley of echoes that thundered back from the rocks. The stag fell, and the blinding mist presently rolled down over them like a curtain.

“That was a very *young* thing—that vow, or oath, or whatever you may choose to call it, of poor Ronald’s,” said Lord Sandysmere once to Norman Douglas.

“It was made, however,” the General answered, gravely.

“True ; I only feel that it puts him at a disadvantage among his Highland neighbours. Don’t mew him up too closely at Dalbraith, General. Let him come to me and have a little hunting this winter. He would shut himself up in La Trappe to please you, and small blame to him ; but he looks terribly restless now and then—uncomfortably like a bottled wasp, as Cousin Grizel says.”

General Douglas smiled securely. “We have his load-star here, luckily,” he said. “Let him go and hunt by all means, if he wishes it, but I fancy he will not care to wander far when he leaves his ladye love behind.”

“My dear old friend,” answered Lord Sandysmere, laughing, “you are a very knight of the round table, and you ought to have been born in the sixth century.”

He went away south for his hunting and his covert-shooting, but his thoughts often returned to the people with whom he had of late been

living, and at Easter he managed to assemble a good many of them at Sandysmere.

Kenneth came among the rest. He had been trying honestly all the winter to forget Marion and to reconcile himself to the new order of things, and he arrived at Sandysmere rather in the mood to “treat resolution,” like the Irishman. At first, Ronald was not there, and things went smoothly enough. He was constantly with Marion. Her engagement not being announced, was seldom mentioned between them, and she never now reproached him or entreated him to free himself from his secret. Kenneth was content to bask in the sweet, grave kindness of her manner, and Marion told herself that she rejoiced in having got the brother of her childhood back again. Poor child, she was attempting a difficult task. She was trying hard to keep a bandage over her eyes. Now and then it slipped aside for a moment, and an unwelcome light streamed in and startled her, but in general she succeeded in keeping her misgivings at a distance.

But Kenneth made no attempt to blind himself. It was only late on the Saturday evening that Ronald joined the party, and already the sky was overcast with clouds, and dark with storm for Kenneth. He could not keep still

when he saw Marion with his cousin. This gnawing misery and restlessness was a new feeling. It was one thing, he discovered, to think of Marion as yielded to his rival by an act of magnanimity of his own, and quite another to see her quietly claimed by Ronald as a right.

Yesterday evening, after his arrival, Ronald kept her out till late, lingering on the terrace to listen to the nightingales. Kenneth, meanwhile, sat in the lighted drawing-room with his head bent over a newspaper, apparently deeply engrossed, but in reality only watching with jealous impatience for the sound of their steps and voices. And this morning, before church, Ronald asked her to go with him to see the old Den, and as Kenneth passed the open door, he saw them standing in the window, Marion holding a letter which Ronald was reading also, with his hand resting on her shoulder.

Kenneth said to himself that it was unbearable, and he walked off sternly with his father to a distant church that he might be out of their way.

But in the afternoon, he was on the watch again. He would talk to nobody; said he did not wish for any luncheon, and put aside Granny's solicitude on the plea of a racking

headache. Once or twice he saw Marion looking at him imploringly, but he took no notice of her. It seemed easy enough for her to do without him. She was as well pleased to be with one person apparently, as another. Let Ronald have it all his own way if he chose. *He* certainly should not dream of interfering. And yet a few minutes afterwards he found some pretext on which to send the children into the conservatory, to disturb the *tête-à-tête* among the palm trees and azaleas. After that he grew angry with himself for his childishness. What would be gained even if he did part them for half an hour?

The walk home under the hawthorns after church exhausted Kenneth's powers of endurance. The brilliant sunshine and the careless talk palled on him in his jealous wretchedness. He longed to be by himself, but somehow could not tear himself away, leaving those two always together. The scattered groups joined again as they came into the park. Douglas had found a deserted partridge's nest in the long grass, and he and Marion were intent on carrying it to the keeper's house. There they fell in with Lord Sandysmere's sister Mary, who with her husband and children had been doing the honours of her brother's house, while it was full of guests.

She was leaning over the gate of the keeper's garden, and talking to the old lady in her Sunday bonnet who stood within.

"Yis, yis," Mrs. Ringer was saying, as Kenneth gloomily following, joined the group round the gate; "my husband, he were in Scotland last harvest time along with my lord, but he weren't no matters there. He didn't fare to like himself at all, and that's the truth."

"Do you hear, Ronald?" said his aunt, turning round. "Ringer did not like himself at Dalbraith. What do you say to that?"

"Lawk!" said the old woman, "he hadn't a mind to go and leave his 'buds' (*Anglice*—partridges), John hadn't, and it fatagued me a good bit to have him go; but 'twere a change for my lord, that were it. 'Tis a change, Mrs. Ringer,' he sa' to me, my lord sa'. 'Lawk, lordship,' I sa' to him, 'and what du yu want of a change together, and a fine sight o' buds tu, a wanting badly to be killed at yours?' But he was right consistent, my lord was, for to go."

"Ah," said Lord Sandysmere, "John didn't much like the hills."

"Well, my lord; I don't expect that not no one—begging the young gentleman's pardon—I shouldn't expect no one could abide them

hills, save them as are fo'sed to preside in them,” with a curtsey and a smile to Ronald. “John was hampered to sit the chay, a going twisting up them, and his dear limbs, he told me when he got home, they right racked with climbing—that they did—right racked!”

“But John did think it a fine country, surely, Mrs. Ringer,” pleaded Douglas, while Kenneth, wondering what they all found to amuse them in gossiping with a prejudiced old woman, grimly walked away.

“Well, sir,” and Mrs. Ringer tried to recall some compliment, “if so be as he did, he didn’t name of it to me, not as I can collect myself. There were a goodish tidy sized lot of he’th, he sa’, but the land was but very moderate; and he didn’t see a tunup—not to call a tunup—the hull of the time he were there, and not a tree—if you’ll believe me, for I’m tellin’ of yu the treuth—not a blessed tree in all the forest; and that fare kind of onsatisfactory now, Miss Mary, don’t it?”

What nonsense it all seemed to Kenneth.

“I told them to put your tea under the cedars,” he presently heard Lord Sandysmere say to his sister. “The General and I are off for a long walk.”

Kenneth went up on to the terrace by him-

self, and stood with folded arms watching them all in the garden below. Sir Charles Stuart presently betook himself to the smoking-room. Marion as she passed, looked up and beckoned to her cousin, but he pretended to be looking another way.

He and a gorgeous peacock that was perched on the terrace-wall, were left quite alone. Every one else seemed to belong to somebody. At this hour yesterday he and Marion were riding slowly homewards down the great avenue. The sun was pouring long level beams between the boles of the huge beeches, now and then gliding Marion's fair hair, or lighting up her face as she rode in and out of the shadow. The quiet evening world seemed to belong to them alone, and they to belong to each other. To-day——

“Why did you not come with us?” suddenly asked Marion's voice close beside him.

Kenneth was leaning on the balustrade at the top of the garden-steps. He had to move aside in order to let her pass. He did so in silence, but she stood still and repeated her question.

“I don't think that is a very kind question, Marion,” he answered, without looking at her.

“Kenneth!” and she put her hand on his arm.

He freed himself and walked two or three steps away. Love and honour were tugging at his heart-strings, dragging him in opposite directions, and within the last hour a new resolve had been half-formed in his mind—should he put it into Marion’s hands to decide for him?

“London and the world again to-morrow,” said Agénor de Beaurepaire, coming up with a tragic air. “The last evening in the peaceful country.”

He was a small, dark, lively young fellow, so by the law of contraries he greatly admired his English cousin’s fair, graceful head and slender figure.

“It has been a pleasant time,” she answered, rather absently.

“To-day especially,” added Kenneth, with a sneer.

It was his last chance, however, of speaking to her. “I rather want to ask you a question,” he began, but he broke off with an impatient stamp, as Douglas ran up the steps.

“Don’t go in yet, Marion,” said this second interloper. “Come down with me to the mere to see the water-fowl.”

Marion hesitated; Kenneth turned away directly, and went with quick strides into the house.

That evening after dinner, Lord Sandysmere proposed a toast. It had been a very cheery dinner, sociable and pleasant, as is often the case when the remnants of a large party gather together for the last time, and there is a round table, and one or two people who are willing to do all the talking.

"Farewell and good speed," said the host, "to Sir Charles Stuart and his new aide-de-camp."

Several people looked up. Kenneth, who had been talking much and gaily, stopped suddenly now, and looked at Marion.

"We know the General," said one; "but the aide-de-camp—"

"To the unknown aide-de-camp," added Douglas, raising his glass.

Marion turned to her father. Lady Beatrix, smiling, held out her hand to Kenneth, who sat beside her.

"I see Granny is in the secret," observed Lord Sandysmere; "but I was under the impression that you all knew."

"What is it?" asked Marion, leaning forward, and speaking to General Douglas.

"Only that Kenneth is going out to India with your father. I am glad to say he does not care to dawdle away his life at London parties."

“He never thought of it until just before dinner to-day,” observed Sir Charles Stuart drily.

“Well, you are an enviable fellow,” said Douglas.

“Do you think so?” responded Kenneth.

“Marion,” said Lord Sandysmere, “you have not done proper honour to my toast. I can’t let any of you off.”

She turned towards Kenneth, and caught his eyes fixed on her.

“To your good health, Kenneth.” Her voice was quite clear and steady; but he was rather pale, and only nodded in answer to her pledge.

That evening the nightingales sang unheeded. Marion was tired, and made her escape early to her own room.

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A few weeks of incessant bustle followed in London. Miss Montrose’s hospitable house was again put into requisition; but this time nobody had leisure to look at the boats on the river, or to talk of anything but Indian outfits. When the chimes from Westminster came to them on the wind, there was no moralizing; it was only the sign that another busy, short-lived hour “had gone over to the majority.”

Lady Beatrix and Marion were allowed, as a special favour, to go down as far as Dover

to see their travellers off. Everybody was especially tender over Granny just now, she was so brave and serene; but they all knew that it was not likely she would ever see her son again. He and Kenneth were going out overland, and General Douglas was to go with them to Paris.

The last dinner at the Ship Hotel was over; that odd last dinner, with its disjointed talk about common interests which have been snapped in two, and a future that divides itself sharply to-night into diverging lines. The night boat was to start in an hour or two.

Marion and Kenneth had gone out upon the balcony overlooking the harbour. It was a dark and quiet night. The lamps were lighted along the quays, and each one dropped down a quivering reflection on the water beneath. Now and then the murmur of the tide outside was heard, and the swell and splash of a stray wave that had wandered into the harbour, and broken against its wall.

A German band was playing a little way off, its tones sweetened and softened by the distance. It had gone through its repertoire of well-worn opera-airs and of German walses, and now it had fallen on to Mendelssohn's farewell song, wherein is all the yearning, the

resignation, and the hope, of parting. The refrain especially which comes back often, tells its own story so plainly that the words, “*Auf Wiedersehen!*” sound as if really spoken instead of only rendered by the music.

“When shall you see Douglas?” asked Kenneth, so suddenly that Marion started.

“I do not know,” she answered, not quite steadily, as he could hear.

“Poor Marion,” he said; “it will be better for you, as well as for me, when we are off. You can’t help caring for your old friends.”

“Why should I?” answered Marion.

“Why, indeed. I hope it does not hurt you to remember. As for me, it is high time I was away. There is no place left for me at home. If it is any particular comfort to you to know it, Marion,” he continued, with a sudden access of bitterness, “you may assure yourself that the old blunder has been well avenged. Douglas has the best of it, after all. It is a strange Nemesis that has overtaken that mistake of poor old Adam’s; for through it, all I cared for in the world has gone to Douglas. It has made him far dearer to my father than I can ever be—and now—you ——”

“Kenneth,” said Marion, putting a hand that trembled violently on his arm, “it is not

too late—put the wrong right before you go—tell your father to-night.”

If there had been light enough he would have seen how her eyes were burning, her cheeks glowing with a sudden hope.

He lifted up his hand—“Now? Less than ever. What would be gained now? Spare me—to-night; don’t let us begin it all over again. Leave the past alone. Do you think I would lightly refuse any wish of yours, Marion?”

“I would stand by you,” said Marion, breathlessly; “we would face it all together. Oh, Kenneth!”

“Not even for that—not even for that. It can serve no good end now. Would you have me kill my father? Don’t ask me to take his curse away with me. Pity me—my love—my love.”

He leant forward on the balcony, and buried his face in his hands. Marion stood by him, almost giddy from the dazzle of her momentary hope, and its quick extinction.

“You think I am false,” said Kenneth, abruptly raising his head. “I know you do; but, at all events, I will be true in one thing before I go. We won’t go on acting quite to the end—you and I!” He was not looking

at her, but out at the dark water with the trembling reflections of light. “We are parting to-night, and God knows when I shall see your face again ——”

“*Auf Wiedersehen! Auf Wiedersehen!*” sighed the band below.

“Shall I speak the truth for once, Marion—shall I?”

“No, Kenneth.”

“No? not even now. You are hard. Don’t go away. I dare say you are right, dear; I believe you always are right. But don’t go away just yet. You used to like to stay with me when we were two children at Dalbraith.”

Oh, the spell of those old days! It was strong upon her still; and in terrible contrast with the quietness of his words was the suppressed pain and passion in his voice. She turned away from him that he might not see that which she knew was in her face.

“Stay a little longer, Marion,” he resumed; “I only want to talk about old times. Do you know that you and I had a quarrel once in the old days—a quarrel!—it seems odd, doesn’t it? a quarrel between you and me—but we really had. You were right then, as usual. Do you remember? It was only about something I wanted you to do without leave,

and you wouldn't do it; you said it wasn't right. No more it was. I was angry with you then. Now I am more reasonable."

Marion could not quite keep back the sound of a half-caught sigh.

"I am not angry now, Marion. I know what I have forfeited and lost. I was angry with you then; but you did not go away—you tried hard to make it up. You said: 'But you do love me still, Kenneth?' and I wouldn't answer. Love you! I remember it—'You do love me,'—poor little, dear, sweet Marion."

"Don't, Kenneth," she whispered.

He turned towards her suddenly and seized both her hands. "But I mean to answer your question now, after all these years; and I say to it, Yes, yes, yes, Marion—with my whole heart—for my whole life—whatever you may do."

He lifted both her hands and pressed them passionately, one after another, to his lips. "And now," he said, "you may go away and leave me if you like."

She turned without a word, and went in at the open window.

Down at the end of the pier the packet was getting up its steam, and panting in the darkness as if eager to be off. They could see the column of black smoke rising, and the sparks

fly upward from the chimney. Another steamer, with its paddles beating the calm black water, and its lights burning, came gliding quietly up to the pier-side.

Outward and homeward bound. Therein was all the difference—the gulf that lies between joyful meetings and dismal partings—between gladness and great pain.

In the room behind the balcony Lady Beatrix sat, very pale and quiet, holding her son's hand. There was a slight bustle beginning—people coming in to carry off dispatch-boxes and travelling-bags—a little shiver now that the last moment drew so near—a few more sham smiles and would-be careless words. Then a bell rang, long, loud, discordant.

“Marion,” said Kenneth, opening the door of the sitting-room, “will you come here for one minute?”

He had crossed the room from the balcony after she left him, and had gone to his own room. The door at which he now stood opened into a long corridor.

“We must be off directly, Kenneth,” said Sir Charles.

“I am ready, sir; only a minute—Marion—”
She went to him.

The passage was lighted, and people were

passing up and down. "I have a question to ask you," he said very calmly, taking her hand. "My father is coming across with us. I shall have an hour or two with him. If I do as you wish, and tell him that I shot Lord Douglas, will you give up Ronald?"

Marion felt as if the ground had opened beneath her feet; she had no time to think—to consider—only one second in which to take firm hold of her loyalty to Ronald.

"Never, Kenneth; never."

"Think before you resolve," he went on. "There is still one moment before you need decide—remember that it is all which you have wished."

Something like the sound of rushing waters was in Marion's ears, and a flood was closing over her head deafening and blinding her. That she could clear Ronald by a word—that Kenneth would be delivered from his long captivity to a lie—that she might feel free again! Then another thought, which brought a dull aching pain—that like a garment cast off because no longer needed, Kenneth had thrown by his ever-ready excuse that he could not grieve his father. What did he mean? Why at the last moment had he come to her like this? She stood staring at him.

"Speak, Marion."

"But you said it would kill your father," she said faintly, not knowing whether she meant the words as a reproach or not.

"You are more than all the world to me," he answered.

There were movements in the room within ; some one approached the door ; Kenneth laid his hand on the lock and looked at her ; she looked back, and knew that she loved him and despised him.

"If I tell, will you give up Ronald ?"

There seemed to Marion but one answer to give to that. She grasped it as a drowning man catches at a rope. "I cannot."

Without another word he opened the door and motioned her to pass him.

Sir Charles got up as they entered. It was very quickly over after that. They told Lady Beatrix that she must not go down to the pier, and she yielded with a smile. Marion stayed with her. She knew her father kissed her and blessed her—but though she was vaguely anxious about Granny, she could not see how she parted with her son, for Kenneth had approached her again, and with his white lip quivering into a sort of smile, was holding her hand and whispering huskily : "Marion, you

always used to look after my things—keep this safe for me—it was my mother's. Good-bye. God bless you—and him."

He put something into her hand, on which her fingers closed mechanically. When she opened them an hour afterwards, a little old-fashioned diamond ring was lying in her palm.

"Come, my boy," said General Douglas, and the convulsive grasp that was crushing her fingers was loosened.

The two women—both tearless—went out on to the balcony. "*Auf Wiedersehen*," called out somebody from below. The dark figures that it was not light enough to distinguish, moved away. Neither Marion nor her grandmother spoke, until, wonderfully soon, the swish of parting waters sounded through the gloom, the lights out yonder moved—turned—and something dark went forth into the open sea.

Then Lady Beatrix went away to her own room. The tears of old age are few; those she shed were very quiet, though she felt weary and broken; but when the sobs that Marion was trying to stifle in her pillow reached her ears from the next room, her first impulse was to go and carry comfort to the poor young heart that needed it.

Marion had given way at last, and had flung herself upon her bed, with her eyes hidden from the light, but by-and-by a very soft hand was laid upon her head, and a kiss fell on her hair.

"Are you crying for your Daddy, Marion?" said the tender voice. "Tell Granny. Hush, child; *you* will see him again."

There was an unconscious stress laid upon the "you," and it contained an appeal that even then Marion understood.

She sat up and put both her arms round her grandmother. Lady Beatrix was nearly frightened, for she always thought of Marion as of one reticent and strong, and now to see her shaken and bowed down with sobs, made her dread some unknown trouble. She steadied her little slight figure as well as she could, for the girl had flung herself with all her weight upon her grandmother, who could only support herself by grasping the post of the bed with one hand, while she drew the poor child closely to her with the other, and said quietly, "You will stop crying, Marion, and then you will tell Granny."

"But I am afraid it isn't because of Daddy," said Marion, as soon as she could speak. Presently she raised herself, pushed back her hair,

and added sorrowfully: "Granny, I am very wicked, and I don't know how to be good again."

Lady Beatrix grasped her hand closely, but she waited and said nothing.

Marion went on. "He said he knew I should be leal and true, and I am false, Granny."

"My child, I don't understand yet."

"I promised Ronald," answered Marion, and then she got up and stood on her feet: "I promised Ronald, but I love Kenneth with all my heart and soul."

"You will do what is right, my Marion," answered Lady Beatrix, after a pause.

"Oh, Granny, tell me what is right. I love Kenneth," she repeated, "with all my heart and soul."

And there was a little diamond ring which had fallen when she rose, and which lay now glittering at her feet.

CHAPTER V.

A LEGACY.

“ ‘ O lassie, I maun lo’e thee ;’
‘ O laddie, lo’e na me,
Lo’e them what ha’e their hearts at hame,
Mine’s lang been far frae me.’ ”

It was nearly two years after Kenneth had gone with Sir Charles Stuart to India, that Lord Douglas sat by himself one evening, leaning his head thoughtfully on his left hand, while with the other he scribbled after an idle fashion over the blotting-paper of the portfolio before him.

A sheet of thin foreign writing-paper lay under his hand, placed there half-an-hour ago, but most of his time since, had been spent standing absently at the window, and looking through the crowded masts of the shipping in the port of Genoa, at the sea which lay beyond, shining like a sapphire under a setting sun.

The letter was apparently a difficult one to write, or else he was in a lazy mood. At last

he dipped his pen into the ink, gave it an impatient preliminary shake, and began rapidly.

*“ Hotel de La Croix de Malte,
Genoa.*

“ MY DEAR MOTHER,

“ An old friend of yours and of my father’s, Monsieur de Beaurepaire, has just died in this hotel. He was ill only for a short time and was quite alone here, but hearing from his servant that Hugh Raymond’s yacht was in the harbour, and that I was on board, he sent for me, and I have been with him for the last few days.

“ He has charged me with a message, and a parting request to you—a sufficiently strange one certainly—and one which I feel it rather difficult to communicate to you in writing.”

Douglas stopped here and glanced back over his opening sentences. “ It is begun at all events, and that is the great thing,” he muttered to himself; “ it sounds about as formal as a lawyer’s letter, but never mind. I cannot write differently to her. Well——”

“ He begged me to bring to your recollection a Christmas you spent at Sandysmere nine years ago; he met you there, and then saw my father for the last time. He believes you will remember some conversations he had with you

both, and a wish he then expressed, which wish, as he repeated several times, circumstances had long since, he was well aware, put it out of your power to fulfil.

“As I have no clue to the subject of the conversation he was referring to, I may not render his meaning very clearly, but I will only repeat as well as I can, that which I understood him to wish me to convey to you. He desires that you should be reminded of some kind words spoken by my father before they parted at Sandysmere, and of a promise given by him, in both your names, to help an old friend if ever it was in your power to do so.”

Ronald had written quickly enough hitherto. Now he stopped, frowned, and bit the end of his pen in perplexity.

“You know all about the Beaurepaires, I believe, so I need not tell you that the eldest son, Gaston,”—(here was another pause, and a good deal of scratching out),—“that poor Gaston has not hitherto borne a particularly high character. Uncle Norman can tell you all about him, and of course you remember—” but through that sentence also Douglas drew his pen after a few minutes pondering.

“There,” he said, “that must do, if only she

can make anything of the blotted bits—Uncle Norman knows.”

“On account of all this,” the letter went on, “M. de Beaurepaire could not at present leave Gaston guardian of his only daughter (of course you know that there is an only daughter), and Agénor, the other brother, is too young, and is knocking about the world, and altogether unfit to take charge of his sister. She is about”—

“Ronald!” and a head was suddenly put in at the door.

“For goodness’ sake go away, my dear fellow,” said Douglas impatiently, “and don’t bother me just now, whatever you do!”

“I have just come ashore,” said Hugh Raymond, advancing into the room, and showing signs of settling himself in an arm-chair. “They told me, downstairs, that your friend was dead.”

“Yes, he is; but I have got a letter to write, so pray don’t sit there staring at me, or I shall never get it done. I never in my life had such a queer sort of letter to write.”

“Then you can’t come out, or settle when you will be ready to get off. I am getting rather sick of Genoa, do you know? Couldn’t we sail to-night?”

“We can’t sail at all unless you leave me

alone. I tell you I must get this letter off my mind, and I can't do it unless I am by myself."

"Well—" and Hugh Raymond, easy going though slightly aggrieved, took himself off again.

Left alone, Ronald turned back to his writing, then pushed away his chair, and paced up and down the room.

"There, it has all gone out of my head. I knew it would, and I had got it all pat if I had not been interrupted. What in the name of fortune was I going to say? 'She is about'—about what?—and who is 'she?' Oh, the girl. Yes, well, come, how anxious he was about her, poor old fellow, and he did say my father had promised to look after her. It was an odd thing to do, and I certainly never heard of it—however—"

"The young lady," he wrote, "seems to have no near relations, and her poor father was uncommonly anxious that you should have her at Dalbraith, to be with you and near Granny, at least until such time as one of her brothers can marry and make a home for her."

("There! it is out. What will my mother say?—a French young lady at Dalbraith!")

"I know it was a bold thing for me to make anything like a promise in your name, my

dear mother, but I was fairly puzzled : M. de Beaurepaire was so convinced that you would be more than willing to carry out that which he believed to be a real wish of my father's—the wish to help him in the perplexity he already foresaw, if he were ever to leave his daughter without any natural protector. He leaves her in your hands. His wish, as I gathered from some words he let fall, would be that she should eventually marry an Englishman—at least he seemed to have some such fancy in his mind.”

Here Ronald laid down his pen, and leaning forward with his eyes shaded by his hands, recalled the scene he had witnessed only yesterday.

The dying man had pleaded his cause most eagerly. Death had come upon him at un-awares, and in a strange place. He was alone. One son, for whom he would not send, was an inveterate gambler—the other a mere boy, to whom it would be a mockery to leave the sole care of a young sister.

With the persistency that belonged to his character, his thoughts had recurred to the old wish of many years ago, which indeed he had never entirely laid aside. It may be that the tidings of Lord Douglas being in the bay, on

board his friend's yacht, had rekindled it into fresh vigour. It is likely too, that in his weakness, his mind had wandered back to the great friendship of his early days, and to the associations of his youth. He had always liked the young Ronald, and felt confidence in him, even in those melancholy days when his son Gaston won him over for a brief space to his own evil ways.

It seemed to him now, that the young man had been sent by a higher Power to be the solace of his death-bed.

The thought of leaving Diane all alone weighed with increasing heaviness on him as his end drew near, and he felt remorsefully that he had never cared for her future as he should have done.

Visions, faint and often shifting, had come and gone before his eyes during the long solitary nights. Out of the shadows a girl's young face shaped itself before him—a lovely, impatient, sensitive little face.

Sometimes it was a very small child he saw, sitting on the floor with her legs stretched out in front of her, staring gravely at him with a pair of wonderful dark-fringed grey eyes.

Sometimes he heard a sweet, loud, shrill laugh, and caught a glimpse of the bright face

peeping at him over the gallery of a great staircase. And then a voice said, "*Ne riez pas si fort, Mademoiselle Diane,*" and a door was shut. How those words tormented him, and echoed wearily through his fevered brain. He wished he had looked up and laughed back at the child, before the door was shut.

His servant heard him moaning, and came noiselessly up to the bedside, but he closed his eyes, and motioned him away.

Again, he saw a lonely little figure in an old garden, with brown, bronzed hair blown about over her forehead, standing on tiptoe to kiss a tall white lily.

Oftenest of all there came to him the picture of a young girl in a dim room, with her head raised, and her small red mouth half open. She is singing; he can hear the strong, clear, liquid notes, the grave old harmony. 'Agnus Dei'—it is Pergolese's music that she sings. Oh, child, he hears the grand, sweet words—sing on! 'Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi.'

Morning comes, the loud, clashing bells from the campanile close at hand, ring for matins, the feverish visions are gone. In sober earnest he is thinking of her fate. He longs to place her under the care of Lady Douglas. Young as Lord Douglas was, he could surely constitute

him in some sort her guardian, as his mother's representative. In her name he now asks him to promise that the child shall never, with her sanction, marry other than a "good" man.

"Some one that is above reproach," he said; "some one whom she can look up to—not a man of the world, such as I have been—with the world's creed, the world's way of looking at right and wrong. Somehow one grows to see things differently lying here. Don't let my poor little girl have an unhappy life, as I think hers would be if she could not respect her husband. Let him be a good Christian, Douglas, as your Uncle Norman is a Christian, stainless and devout, loyal and humble. Are there such men in the world?—the good God send such an one to guard and bless my Diane!"

"And above all," he added, raising himself up on his pillows in his eagerness, and fixing his sunken glowing eyes on Douglas; "above all, promise in your mother's name as well as your own, that she will never consent to her marriage, with a man who has been a gambler."

Douglas started and winced. The sick man saw the eyes which were fixed compassionately on his, waver as a candle wavers in a draught of air; but he gave the promise required briefly

and without comment: "As far as shall be in my power," he said quietly.

"If things had been otherwise," Monsieur de Beaurepaire went on, "I do not scruple to tell you that I might have wished you to be yourself my child's husband, but now that can never be—I do not think of it."

"I know," said Ronald, bending down his head, while a quick red flush dyed his forehead.

M. de Beaurepaire looked at him kindly. "You understand me, Douglas, I should have wished it, under other circumstances. I once spoke of it to your dear father. It has been a disappointment to me, I admit; but it is wholly out of the question now—I know that."

"Yes," repeated Ronald, rather bitterly. "I understand."

"I have wounded you," said the other, watching him; "that indeed, was far from my intention."

"You are quite right," and Douglas frankly clasped the hand that was extended to him; but there was a look of keen regret and trouble in his face that M. de Beaurepaire could not understand, and for which Ronald could hardly have accounted himself.

The two were at cross-purposes. Diane's

father believed the young man to be betrothed to his cousin, Marion Stuart ; and on his side Douglas understood himself to be numbered among those persons who would be unfit to have the care of a young wife entrusted to them.

It renewed an old impression which many things during the last two years had contributed to strengthen—that he was for ever unworthy of the love of a good woman.

It did not strike him that M. de Beaurepaire could be referring to his brief engagement to Marion. How should any report of it have reached him ? He himself seldom remembered it now. He never looked back if he could help it, but to-day as he sat there with his letter to his mother lying unfinished before him, his thoughts wandered unchecked over that closed chapter of his life, with its abrupt, jarring termination.

He hated thinking of it. It was strangely puzzling to him why the events of that time should have been suffered to take place.

They had driven him out again from the home to which he had been striving to bind himself by fresh and strong ties. They had caused the first and only cloud that had ever arisen between him and the best friend of all

his life, Norman Douglas, and they had added two years of aimless wandering, at first of utter recklessness, to the blotted empty chronicle of his existence.

Long ago he had forgiven Marion, and looking back, he could well believe that she had tried her best to be true to a man she could not love. He even acknowledged now that it was better for them both to have parted when they did, but all the same he wondered over that old mistake and its weary consequences.

And Marion wondered too, wondered sadly, in the bitterness of her heart. At first, in blank despair, she could see no more than that she had missed the right path ; that, with all her lofty resolves to give herself up to duty, she had somehow fallen into a grievous error.

Alas for the many mistakes and false steps in the world !—if indeed this world were all. But if it is only the ante-chamber to a larger life ; if it is by their falls and failures that the Master trains His servants for a work that will be nobler and higher than any they are fit for here, then they may well be patient with themselves, and may wait hopefully on Him.

Marion had not learnt to be patient. She only felt that, after Kenneth went away, darkness and perplexity were round her. It would

have been easy to go forward along a clear path of duty, however rough it might have been ; easy even to stand still and wait to be shown the way ; but she had come to a place where many conflicting roads met and crossed and confused her—she must needs choose one, but which among the many was the right one, she could not tell. In her dire perplexity she learnt to pray, and then to trust, for the one step that she needed at a time was always shown to her.

☞ The days following her parting with Kenneth were the darkest. But by degrees one thing began to grow clear to her, and that was, that her own words of love to Kenneth had separated her from Ronald for ever. She could not knowingly deceive him ; she could not add to her involuntary disloyalty that deeper wrong.

So she too—she whom he loved, and thought to be so worthy of his faith—she too must turn from him ! Her hand must wound him—and he trusted her so frankly and thought so humbly of himself !

For a time she rebelled fiercely against that older, stronger love, which she could not disallow ! Why must she turn from the higher nature, to cling against her will, to the lower ?—for she saw with a melancholy helpless clearness which of the two men was the more worthy.

But she was not free to choose. The consciousness of a strong, unwilling, slowly-deepening affection had gradually dawned on her; a consciousness that she dreaded and resisted, that terrified and humbled her.

She, the proud true Marion, to love one who had fallen as Kenneth had done! She, who had suffered so deeply through him—who had so loathed his sin! She who was promised to another!

And yet by the strong chain of a life-long memory—by his passionate love, by his winning tongue, by his bursts of sadness, by her very yearning sorrow over him, and by her prayers and tears for him—he held her heart in his.

She could not help herself; she could not keep his image from standing between her and Ronald.

And so there was no other way. She must tell Ronald the truth, and leave herself in his hands.

If he had been angry with her it would have been far easier to bear it; if he had been less manly and generous in his pain and his forgiveness, she might have forgiven herself sooner. But he would not blame her; he tried, after the first, not to let her see how she had hurt him.

“Wait a minute,” he said to her when

first the drift of her hurried stumbling sentences began to reach his understanding, "give me your hand. Do not speak directly;" and she saw him straighten himself as if to receive a blow. He stood gathering together his powers of self-command, for he guessed what was coming. His eyes gleamed, and his chest heaved.

Marion stood before him like a culprit. "You are not going to throw me over," he said huskily. "That is impossible."

She raised her eyes to his. Should she never again see that look of pleading trust bent on her?

At that moment she knew nothing, felt nothing, but that she could not grieve him. For a few breathless, suffocating moments her purpose wavered. Might she not, even at the eleventh hour, spare herself and him? Was it not her duty to stand by her plighted word? Was it not love, real love, that was hurting her like this?

And then like the swing of a pendulum came the swift reaction. She thought of Kenneth, and her head sank low in shame. Could she be doubly disloyal?—untrue alike to Ronald and to him? God forgive her, she prayed, and grant her courage.

"Ronald," she forced herself to say, though her voice was so faint that he had to bend down

his head to hear her—"before Kenneth went"—and then the words failed.

"Kenneth," he repeated; "is it that? Kenneth? You must go on now."

"Kenneth and I—Oh, Ronald! we were always together; we have always loved each other—forgive us."

"Always?"

"I did not know it," she said, clasping her hands together.

There was a dead silence, broken only by one or two long-drawn breaths.

"Why did you accept me, Marion?" he asked at last.

How was she to answer?—the colour dyed her pale face crimson. "I wanted—to marry you," she said in a low voice.

"And yet you cared all the time for Kenneth."

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

She tried to speak again. Oh, if only she could have told him all. If only she might have shown him the purpose of her life, and at least given a reason for her strange attempt and failure. But no, she must endure being misjudged. In vain she struggled to utter a word or two; her heart beat too violently for any sound to come. He saw it.

“Do not be frightened, Marion,” he said gently. “Of course you are free to do as you like best.”

“It is not that—it is not that. I don’t want to be happy. I can never be happy again; but I am forced to tell the truth to you.”

“Of course.”

Ronald turned away from her, setting his teeth and clenching his hands in his effort to keep silent. Bitter words were crowding on to his lips, but he forced them back; grief, reproaches, anger, contempt for Kenneth, struggled for utterance; but though Marion was deserting him he could not help believing in her still.

“I thought you loved me,” he said at last, and in those simple words lay the one reproach he made her.

But it was part of Marion’s punishment to know that she had done him harm; that though he treated her with the generous chivalry that belonged to him, yet that afterwards he was hardened and embittered by the pain he would not show. She had never more than half-understood him, and yet she feared for him; feared that he would lose all faith in hope and love.

He left her at last with a kind, resolute

smile, and a few words of full forgiveness ; but he left her to fight his battle by himself. And in that battle for a while he was a loser. He grew reckless, believing that no one in the world cared much what became of him. "Everything goes against me," he said to himself, and the few months that followed his parting with Marion were dark and bad ones—the worst of all his life. There is no need to dwell on them. They were full of misery, and hateful to remember afterwards.

He asked her before he went away, not to let General Douglas hear that his son had any share in separating them. "It would cut him to the quick," he said, "and I will not have him grieved if I can help it."

"Another secret!" said Marion, with a sigh of weariness. Ronald looked at her. "I know of no former secret," he said gravely, "and I think I have a right to ask you this."

But as it happened, Kenneth himself made confession to his father, before he bade him farewell, of his luckless love.

The General was shocked and grieved. However, as Kenneth told the story—and indeed as he believed—Marion had remained faithful to her troth-plight, and he did not even know

from any spoken word that his affection for her was returned.

Thus the blow which would have been a heavy one was broken to his father. It was all over before he returned to England, and, indeed, as Grizel said, "The General had no person to thank but himself, for he had given the bairns neither peace nor rest until they said they were in love with each other, to oblige him."

And the General submitted to this rebuke with such unwonted meekness that it was believed he must see some justice in it.

It was afterwards that he and Ronald had a quarrel. The young man insisted on his uncle's sanctioning some sort of an engagement between Kenneth and Marion.

"Everyone knew they cared for one another," he said, "and what could be the use of keeping them apart? At all events," he added haughtily, "remember that *I* do not choose to stand between them. Quixotism does not answer in the present age, Uncle Norman. You had better consent."

General Douglas was grievously offended. The words and the tone both stung him. But time, the great wonder-worker, had its way with him at last. The old heat died out.

Kenneth was distinguishing himself in India. He wrote, asking his father over and over again to grant him a word—only one word of hope.

“Marion,” her uncle said to her one day, when she had been sitting by him for an hour, reading aloud the Indian newspapers, “are you going to be my daughter at some future time? Both the boys seem to have set their minds on it.”

The girl looked up at him quickly as if she was about to speak, then stopped herself, and only bent down silently and kissed his hand. Once again her tongue was tied. How was she to explain that though she had given up Ronald for Kenneth’s sake, there was a bar between them still? All the pain she had gone through had numbed her. Sometimes she almost doubted whether she still loved Kenneth. And yet—well, she must say nothing. And so her consent was taken for granted, without words.

Lord Douglas meanwhile had joined an expedition formed for scientific purposes to Morocco. That season of wild travel did him good; it brought into play the patient energy of his character, and his great powers of endurance. Nature had perhaps intended him for a soldier, but as that life was denied him, a journey through

an unknown and difficult country provided the best outlet for the love of danger and hardship, the delight in surmounting obstacles, and the love of nature in her wildest and most savage moods, that made a monotonous and joyless life at home almost unbearable to him. He fell in with his friend's yacht at Algiers, and was on his way to England when he met Monsieur de Beaurepaire at Genoa. The letter he presently sent home fell like a bomb-shell on the quiet household of Dalbraith. It was long indeed, since any event had broken in upon the even tenour of life in the old place.

This seemed like the ancient fairy tale reversed. The enchanted princess herself was coming to break the spell of sleep and silence that had fallen on the house. Her father had known how to use the one charm which would throw open its gates to her, when he pleaded for her welcome in the name of Lord Douglas.

Margaret never hesitated. She remembered that last Christmas at Sandysmere vividly; her own talk with René de Beaurepaire, and her husband's real, though half-amused regret, that his old friend had not asked him to do anything that was within his power. She had always liked the Frenchman because of his genuine love and admiration for Douglas; and

among the treasures that she kept carefully laid away was a letter written in a strain of almost passionate sorrow, which she had received from him in the early days of her widowhood.

They never met afterwards, for she refused his offer to come and visit her at Dalbraith; but she heard of him now and again through Norman Douglas, and she sometimes thought with interest of the motherless little daughter, whom he had been so anxious to present her with.

And now he was gone, and in dying had remembered and claimed his friend's old promise. Douglas, she knew, would have been eager to help, and now there was something that comforted and pleased Margaret in feeling that she could redeem a pledge which he had given. It seemed quite natural to her to accept Diane as a charge left her by her husband. She did not pause to consider any change that it would bring into her life.

With a gleam of solitary amusement she read Ronald's grave, unconscious reference to that queer project which the dead man once had so much at heart; but she did not give the "*mot de l'enigme*" even to Grizel.

For her part that worthy was overwhelmed with consternation. "The poor misguided

lad," she said, "bringing a foreigner — an ambassador's daughter—a real French young lady, down upon us here, and I who have such a horror of everything that's to do with the French—haven't you, dear Granny?"

"Scarcely," answered Granny, dryly.

"Eh, not?—well, for certain, now I come to think upon it you're half a Frenchwoman yourself. How could I be so dull? Do pardon me, Granny. I only meant to say that they are all frivolous and treacherous, nothing more than that I assure you, so Marion need not glower at me like that."

"My dear Grizzy, it doesn't matter at all."

"Not that I wonder at her, if she thinks I meant a word against her Granny, or against the French nation either, poor things. They didn't make themselves, and after all they have pretty warm-hearted manners. I'm very partial to a warm manner; are not you, Margaret?"

"And I dare say," continued Grizel, without waiting for an answer, "that this poor young creature will be as gay as a lark, for they have no depth of feeling; and though she has just lost her father, she won't be breaking her heart after him, as you, Marion, may well understand, seeing you have a wee droppie of French

blood in your veins yourself. 'Out of sight out of mind' is the way with them all."

"That cap doesn't fit Marion," said Lady Beatrix, for Marion had coloured a little.

"Eh?" and Grizel looked about her with round innocent eyes. "I was but just passing the remark that we old folk will not be the worse for something to stir us up a little. I sometimes think we are all a thought too serious here. It's more befitting our years, without a doubt (not yours, Marion, for you are but a lassie yet, and I would fain see you blithe and gay again, singing up the stair as you used when you and poor Kenneth were young bairns), but it's becoming our years—Margaret's and mine, and Granny's too—to be thinking on our latter ends; only as I was saying, and I don't know if you agree with me, Margaret, my dear, I do love a good laugh here and there myself. There's a music in it that rings in my old heart and does it good."

"Well," said Lady Beatrix, "and I dare say little Diane is a merry child."

"Child!" and Grizel resumed her solemn warning manner. "Child! eh, but are you aware that she is hard upon eighteen? They are women at that age—women of the world—married, some of them, poor bodies—and wholly

taken up about their dress and their vanities and even worse," with a significant frown, followed by a shake of the head at Granny. "I have but a poor opinion of them, and I may say it out to you, seeing you got safe to Scotland yourself, before any harm could come to you."

"Well," said Lady Beatrix again, "we must hope for the best with this poor little girl, and try to make her happy."

"Aye; she'll surely be ill to please if she doesn't love this bonny spot," said Grizel, looking round her with loving eyes; "and after the dirty towns she has lived in—Paris or Rome,—and the French country that's as flat as an oaten cake, they tell me. And we *will* hope for the best," she added, with a burst of enthusiasm; "though I don't deny I have my fears when I think of her up-bringing. Look at her father—an ambassador"—(with withering scorn), "hanging about one foreign court or another all his days; not to speak of her grandfather whom none can think of as well respected that loves you, my dear, good Auntie—"

"We need not go back quite so far as that," said Lady Beatrix quietly.

"And no one will spoil Diane half as much

as Grizel, when once she is here," added Marion.

Poor little Diane de Beaurepaire !—hers had been an odd, varied, broken life ; but Grizel need not have been afraid. Ambassador's daughter she might be ; and, of necessity, surrounded from her babyhood by all sorts of people ; but she was too much of a child at the time of her father's death, ever to have been into what is called the world.

As a little thing of three years old her first remembrance was of a big German house, where she was allowed to wander about almost as she liked, and to make friends in her frank, innocent fashion, with all the people who came to see her father. This just suited the little maiden. She was a thorough romp, ripe for any mischief, and few people could resist her ringing laugh. Grave statesmen played with the merry child, and brought her sugar-plums ; celebrated philosophers told her fairy tales ; and artists, with world-wide fame, asked leave to paint her little face, and when she was taken to their studios, carried her about on their shoulders, that she might see their pictures better. The greatest of living musicians had been content to play soft, gay music for the

little one, to accompany her as she danced fairy reels in the great empty reception-rooms of the Embassy.

Afterwards the scene of her little life shifted, and in place of the German city there was an Italian villa on the hills near Perugia, a villa with terrace-gardens, whereof the marble balustrades were broken ; and with fountains where Tritons no longer caught the silver-bright water in the conch-shells they held out.

There, in the cosmopolitan fashion in which everything that concerned her was managed, Diane learnt from her father's elderly English groom to ride an English pony, cantering Tom-boy gaily over Italian hills, that were covered with chestnut and olive groves.

There were no philosophers or friendly statesmen here ; but the garden was full of old statues that stood among orange trees. Some of them were statues of children, and for each one of these Diane composed a history out of her own head, and ended by loving them all as if they had been alive.

Often, sitting perched on the shoulder of an old stone river-god, with her arm thrown lovingly round his neck, Diane sang to her silent audience, sang with a gaiety and a pathos that showed the gift was in her.

Often she told them stories, or sat in the sun meditating on the joys and sorrows she had invented for them. No one but a child could understand how real these were to her, how truly her foolish, kind little heart ached for the sorrows that only existed in her own fancy.

Once, a very worthless stucco image of a child got shaken out of its position as she was playing near the spot, and rolling down the bank on which its pedestal stood, fell into the fountain and disappeared under the green weeds and water-lilies.

Diane's *bonne*, sitting with her work under the oleander hard by, looked up startled by the splash; but what was her horror the next moment at seeing Diane rush down the bank like a flash of lightning, and plunge headlong into the fountain?

The excited group of gardeners and workmen, who presently arrived to her rescue, found her trying to scramble up the slippery marble side, with a quantity of long weeds dripping from her hair, and she was lifted out choking, and hugging close to her breast the mutilated remains of the little stucco figure.

Diane was carried home sobbing in dire disgrace, with the headless image in her arms; broken-hearted only because it was little

Léontine, whose mother would be so unhappy that Diane could not find her head at the bottom of the fountain.

“How like Diane!” some people said long years afterwards, when the little story of her naughty childhood was told against her. And so it was.

Not far from the villa the brown walls of a convent rose among the chestnut woods. The chapel bells used to arrest Diane at her play. Thither she often went guarded by her English governess, Mrs. Doran, to be made a great pet and plaything of by the kindly nuns. They taught her to make Venetian point-lace, and delicate sweet-meats; to concoct a mysterious green ointment warranted to cure all scalds and cuts, and various febrifuges out of herbs.

She used to run out of the great convent kitchen to meet Mrs. Doran, with a flushed face and dancing eyes. “Oh, Dolly, I have been making such a delicious mess!” “Dolly” thought that no “mess” ever came amiss to her busy little charge. Mud pies or cunning embroidery alike enchanted Diane. All manufactures were delightful to her. Set her down in an Irish cabin, and in a day or two she would have told you all about the distilling of “poteen.”

And so her childhood passed—sometimes in lonely villas, sometimes in crowds and cities, but always learning, and always as merry as a little bird. Her father, to whom in his wandering life she was a care, a perplexity, an occasional plaything, often an incumbrance, used to shrug his shoulders despondingly, and wonder what life had in store for his pretty little girl. His chief wish concerning her was to make her as English, and as much like her mother as he could, and for that reason he would gladly have given her into the keeping of Lady Douglas. Diane saw little of her brothers. Gaston was a great deal older than she was, and Agénor was always at his college. Sometimes he came home—a miniature man, very prim and well-behaved, and rather inclined to lecture his wild little sister.

The great blessing of Diane's life was her English governess, not a very accomplished woman, but a most good and faithful one, who loved the child, and prayed for her, and kept her true and simple.

She was not old enough during her father's lifetime to go into society, but his friends were always delighted with her, and gathered round her whenever she appeared. It seemed as if she had a peculiar charm for the professors who

taught her, and for the “savans,” and artists, and literary men whose society M. de Beau-repaire affected. Diane amused them. She was a great mimic, and never failed to see a joke. They called her all sorts of pretty names; she was a sunbeam, a cloud, a genius, a little pearl. “Dolly” was sometimes afraid that the child’s head would be turned; but she sagely came to the conclusion that compliments so simply paid would do her no great harm.

Perhaps the artists were right, and that it was a touch of genius that kept her so fresh and child-like, yet made her ‘*simpatica*,’ as they expressed it, to all these thoughtful men. Diane loved to learn, and it pleased them to teach her. They made science into a fairy tale for her. Was it not for her entertainment that the great French professor borrowed the Romano diamonds for his celebrated “*conférence*” on Light, and flashed the prismatic colours of the jewels out of the darkness on to her dazzled eyes? And the quaint old naturalist, Don Pasquale, who insisted on teaching her botany—did he not provide the loveliest flowers for her to pick to pieces in the pursuit of knowledge?

Once and once only Diane appeared at a party in her father’s house at Naples. It was

all wrong, and against the rules; but there were so many famous people coming whom it would be instructive for her to see, that she was allowed to come into the rooms in her little white gown, with a string of pearls round her neck. Diane enjoyed herself amazingly, and her father was amused at the notice people took of her. "La petite a beaucoup brillé," he wrote in his diary.

It was the last party he ever gave. Shortly afterwards he left Naples, and Diane never saw him again.

On the night before he went away he was sitting smoking on the balcony, and his daughter stood behind his chair, looking across the Bay.

"Dost thou know that I once tried to marry thee to a Scotchman?" said M. de Beaurepaire, taking his cigar out of his mouth and blowing a cloud of blue smoke into the air.

Diane did not answer: she was leaning over the balcony trying to catch the real Neapolitan twang of "Santa Lucia," as sung by a small, shrill fisher-boy down on the Chiaja.

Then a little boat with a lateen sail came rocking and curtseying prettily across the bay from Baïe. Diane watched it flit into the path of the moon, gleam for a moment there, and then dance on into the shadow.

“Thou art not attending,” said her father, turning round. “Did any one tell thee of the young Scotchman?”

“No, mon père,” said Diane, properly attentive.

“But thou hast often heard of the Douglas family?”

Yes; Diane had heard very often of the Douglas family, and of Lady Beatrix Stuart, towards whom the behaviour of her grandfather, M. le Marquis Raoul de Beaurepaire, appeared to the little lady so reprehensible, that she did not care to hear it talked about. She made a little mutinous gesture and was silent.

Her father laughed. “He would have made thee a very good husband all the same, the young Douglas, but he would not have thee, Diane; and they tell me he fell in love after their fashion with his cousin.”

“Yes?” Diane looked more interested.

“So there was an end of it. She is the grandchild of that ‘ange de bonté,’ Lady Beatrix. But I loved the young man’s father very much, and if I die before thou art grown up I should like to send thee to his mother.”

Diane put her hand half-shyly and half-caressingly on his arm; but he went on with his own thoughts. “She was a good woman,

that mother, when I knew her—simple, frugal, domesticated”—the little face looking over his shoulder grew very long,—“and such a beautiful head.” M. de Beaurepaire drew an outline in the air with his cigar. Diane brightened up again. “Thou would’st like to go to Scotland, Diane.”

She shook her head. “Ah bella Napoli! Ah suol beato!” she sang softly, but with the nasal drawl of the little lazzarone well caught and reproduced with spirit. “Ah bah!” said her father, stopping his ears. “Thou shalt stay at Naples, and we will marry thee to old Don Pasquale and his caterpillars.”

CHAPTER VI.

DIANE.

“ O Nannie, wilt thou gang wi’ me ?
Nor sigh to leave the flaunting town ?
Can silent glens ha’e charms for thee,
The lonely cot, the russet gown ?
No longer dress’d in silken sheen,
No longer deck’d wi’ jewels rare ;
Say, canst thou quit each costly scene,
Where thou were fairest o’ the fair ? ”

THINGS settle themselves by degrees, or people settle them.

It seemed to require a great deal of correspondence and consultation, before the affairs of the little waif, Diane de Beaurepaire, could be satisfactorily adjusted ; but at last all was properly arranged for her.

For some time after her father’s death they let her remain quietly on in Italy with Mrs. Doran. Then her brother Agénor, who was paternally and amiably anxious to do everything he could for her, was allowed to go to Naples to bring her home, and was very much surprised at the motley group of people who

crowded the railway station to say farewell to Diane, and at the heaps of beautiful bouquets which were showered on her from all sides, as she stood smiling and crying by turns, at the carriage window.

The brother and sister were very grave and mournful when they first met, but it would have been unnatural that their spirits should not rise, when they were fairly on their journey. To neither of them had their father been very familiar, and his loss made no blank in their daily lives.

It was a more real sorrow to Diane that when they reached England she was to part from her faithful and well-beloved 'Dolly.' But there was a bright side even to this, for Dolly was going home to a pretty little Devonshire parsonage, there to keep house for a widower-son, and dearly as she loved Diane, her Basil and his little boy held of necessity the first place in her heart. They had been waiting impatiently for her coming for nearly a year, but Mrs. Doran could not leave her nursling in her trouble.

The two children—for in many ways Agénor and Diane were little more than children—had built many castles in the air before they arrived in Paris.

“I will marry,” the young fellow observed sententiously, “as soon as I am considered to have arrived at a suitable age; and thou wilt come to us, my sister, and my spouse will occupy herself with thy fate.”

Anything so distant as ‘her fate’ held but a small place, however, in Diane’s present thoughts. It was more interesting to her that General Douglas, who was to take her down to Dalbraith, was waiting to receive her in London, and that he and his charge lost their hearts to each other on the spot.

“The boy is a good creature,” he wrote, describing the meeting to Lady Beatrix; “a little bit of a prig certainly, but full of proper feeling.”

Concerning the girl the General was much more enthusiastic, and quoted Wordsworth—“She was a phantom of delight,” he wrote, and he was at the pains to transcribe the whole passage, as a fitting description of Diane. “Her governess,” he added, “a most sensible and admirable person, assures me that she believes Diane will become a very remarkable woman. I have taken her several times to the house of your friend, Miss Montrose of Dunethar, who is a good deal struck with her.”

“A line of plain prose would have pleased

me better than all the General's poetry?" said Grizel, whose soul was still severely exercised concerning the advent of the young stranger. She wrote off immediately to ask Miss Montrose if there was anything special that would be required to meet the wants of this formidable guest.

But she received very scanty information in return. "Do not alarm yourself," was old Miss Montrose's reply. "Get the child a piano if you like, and a pony to ride up the hills on; and buy some Scotch fingering and teach her to make stockings. But mind and don't let Margaret Douglas forget about the piano, for you will only have the half of little Diane without her music."

"It's just as I thought," observed Grizel, pursing up her lips; "good Miss Montrose would have us prepared for the poor child's never having been required to put her hand to any useful work in all her days."

"Well, we shall soon know now," said Marion. "Uncle Norman said they were to be at Edinburgh to-night."

Meanwhile Diane de Beaurepaire had set out hopefully on her journey north, with her maid and her escort, whose fatherly ways and knightly courtesy soon put her at her ease with

him. Every evening she scribbled long letters full of those minute details that older people have no patience to enter into, and sent them off to gladden the heart of 'Dolly,' in her Devonshire parsonage. The one that was awaited there with the most anxiety came at last, to tell how in due time she had reached her far-away destination.

Diane described how she had been carried northward through the strange, wild, moorland country, and had come one evening to the grey old building, half castle, half dwelling-house, with its pepper-pot turrets, and its willow trees beside the defaced moat. And of the majestic and low-voiced woman in her long black dress, who had come out to welcome her.

"They say many people are afraid of her," wrote Diane. "My dear old General stopped me in the hall to tell me I must never be afraid of his poor Margaret. I do not think I should. Why should I? She has simply the most sorrowful face I ever saw. Yes, the most sorrowful,—sadder even than that old Spanish nun, Sister Dolores, in the Convent near Perugia. You said you were sure she had a broken heart. Well, Lady Douglas has just the same look, as if she had fought with grief

till she was tired. And just as I was thinking of Sister Dolores, the door opened, and I began to think I must have gone to sleep and be dreaming of Santa Chiara, for there came in another lady, with an odd, kind, happy face, so like good old Mother Serafina ; do you remember, Dolly ? who used to make those wonderful chocolate cakes.

“ And by-and-by, after we had talked a little about nothing at all, this kind old Serafina took me to my room, at the top of a queer winding stone stair-case, up which we went twisting round and round till we were giddy.

“ She is Grizel Douglas, a cousin, who belongs to everybody, and lives here, and is comfortable and good. When we got up here she kissed me, and said I was kindly welcome to Dalbraith, and that this room was the fittest for me, because it had a bonny outlook, and once in old days, it had been the lady’s bower. It is a pretty old bower, for I suppose a bower means a sitting-room, and there is faded damask hung upon the walls, and some carved cabinets, and a queer japanned mirror that would enchant Maso in the Borg ’ogni Santi. And in the corner there is a quaint old bed draped with damask and white muslin, like the beds in France. Grizel laughed, and said

‘Ugly’ had made it ready for me, because I was a Beaurepaire. I wonder who Ugly is, and whether she is very frightful.

“It was dark, and I could not see the ‘bonny outlook,’ but I put my hand out of the window, and gathered something that I saw glimmering in a crevice of the rough grey wall.

“It was a star-thistle, Dolly, the emblem flower of Scotland!—was not that a pretty greeting?

“When I went down-stairs again, Lady Douglas was still sitting where I had left her, with a shaded lamp beside her, so that one could not see her face; the light only fell on her thin white hands, and the book lying open on her knee.

“There was a man standing on the hearth, leaning his arm on the chimney-piece. Lady Douglas turned a little when I came up to her, and said, ‘Here is Diane, Douglas. Diane, this is my son.’ He came across the room to meet me, and shook my hand in a kind warm way, but he hardly spoke louder than his mother when he said, ‘You are most welcome to Dalbraith.’

“He is a very tall man—wonderfully tall he looked to me, with his broad shoulders, and

his head which seemed to be up above the lamp-light in the shadow of the ceiling. I could not see his face until we came out into the dining-room where there was more light, and then do you know, Dolly, it made me sad—almost as sad as his mother's. He is dark, tanned quite brown by the African sun, and I suppose it is that, and his eyes, that make him look like one of the Savoyard boys that play the musettes in the streets—only of course my cousin is not a boy. You would be sorry for him directly you saw him. His face is full of gloom and shadow. His father has been dead many years now. How his wife and his son must have loved him !

“But, dear Dolly,”—the letter broke off abruptly—“I am sleepy, and Ugly's bed looks comfortable. Lady Douglas came up here with me just now, and stood in the doorway, looking like a picture by Velasquez. She kissed me, and said it was very quiet here, and she was afraid I might be dull. I do not think so. I should like to comfort her. Good night, my Dolly.”

After her maid left her, Diane stood for a few minutes at the window, looking out into the soft whispering stillness through which she could distinguish nothing. The landscape was

wrapped in the sweet mystery which is beloved by Night, and it seemed to Diane that the new life begun to-day, lay shrouded too in its dim folds. "Never mind," she said to herself, "I will get up very early to-morrow and find everything out."

And it was very early next morning when she made her way through the still silent house.

The turret-door, however, stood half open, and presently she passed out through it into the sunshine.

The wide moors, that half-seen, had so impressed her the evening before, now lay full in her view, stretching far away, and steeped in the brief, bright sunlight of a Highland summer.

For miles on one side the broad blaze streamed down unshaded, across the expanse of moss and half-blown heather, until the blue hills met the bluer sky. But on the other side of the house, "the waving woods were dim with leafiness;" the wooded hill, cleft by the winding of the glen, looked cool and dark, and she heard the tinkle of the burn. Diane sprang towards it—"the tiny beck was a merry dancer," and her light feet kept time to its music as she went on by its side.

Presently she deserted it for a steep winding path that climbed yet further into the depths of the wood. In and out it went under the trees, rising by rough steps, sometimes formed by jutting bits of the live rock, sometimes by the roots of the trees themselves. Wild roses in full bloom trailed over the path, and brushed softly across Diane's eyes; here and there a great grey-stemmed, red-branched Scotch fir glowed through a tangle of honeysuckle. The long grass and the bracken and the harebell-cups were still wet and sparkling with dew, and over her head the lavrock's note "lilted wildly up the glen." Diane grasped with both hands at the flowers that grew on each side of the path, dragging down great clusters of broom and foxglove, and softly crooning under her breath the one Scottish song she knew, the "Blue bells of Scotland."

Suddenly the loud report of a gun broke with startling effect on to the stillness. It was so close at hand that she jumped up frightened, from the wild strawberry-bed by which she had knelt down; and as another report rang noisily through the rocks and trees, she set off running, scattering her flowers wildly round her as she flew along the path. It began to descend now in steep, sharp, short-

cuts through the wood. The brawling of the burn sounded straight beneath, and Diane found it very difficult to check herself in her quick downward run.

Slipping on the polished fern-stems, jumping from rock to rock, catching at the branches of sweetbrier that broke off in her hands, she felt herself rushing helplessly down to the rocks and the water, when a man who was standing on the edge of the rock looking down into the burn, turned suddenly, and making a couple of long strides caught her outstretched hands as she came towards him. "Oh!" gasped Diane, coming to a standstill, with one final scramble and slip over a mossy fallen branch, and looking up with wide open eyes into Lord Douglas's face—"how very odd!"

"You ought not to run down the side of a Highland glen like that," he said with a smile, as she grasped his arm with both hands to steady herself.

"It was the gun—I could not stop myself."

"Old Duncan has got hold of a rabbit, I expect," said Lord Douglas; but Diane took no notice. She had forgotten him, the gun, the rabbit, all the world for the moment; for just here the trees thinned and scattered, and through an arch of leafage formed by the

branches of two great cedars, the blue loch glanced on them in the sun.

"How very, very beautiful that is!" said Diane, after a pause.

"Do you know you are trembling all over? Sit down on this rock. What a fright you must have had."

"I was not frightened one bit, and my legs only tremble from jumping down so fast," said Diane, turning round half-indignantly. Her eyes were full of sunshine and laughter, her cheeks flushed like the briar-roses that dangled over her head. It was an almost dazzling vision of youth and brightness—a very incarnation of the summer's morning, that had seemed to rise up suddenly, or rather perhaps to fall down from the sky, at Ronald's side. He looked at her for a minute or two gravely, and then some of the laughter from her sunny eyes passed into his own.

"I see I must teach you to climb our hills," he said.

"What a beginning for me!" said Diane; "I only just meant to come out for one moment, just to look at the little river before breakfast."

"Ah, breakfast," he said, looking at his watch, and then holding out his hand to help her down from the rock on which she had

perched herself, her little feet, steeped in dew and green with moss, dangling crossed before her. "My mother and Grizel will be hunting high and low for you."

"Let us run," exclaimed Diane, jumping down, and beginning zealously to climb the hill-side. Holding her hand still to steady her, and giving quiet answers to her merry talk, the two went back through the glen.

That morning the breakfast at Dalbraith was much less silent than usual. The presence of another person in itself relieved the odd constraint which prevailed between the mother and son, and which Grizel was not enough of a stranger to dispel. Grizel for her part was finding her prejudices give way on every side. It was impossible to resist the pleasure of watching this pretty young face, and she sat smiling broadly as the clear sweet voice went on talking fearlessly to one after the other. Diane presently began to recount the vicissitudes of her first walk. "There I was, stumbling, and jumping, and scratching among the brambles and nettles," she said, with a rueful face.

"You must have gotten a great fright," observed Grizel.

"Ah," the girl went on gaily, "you see I was afraid that Lord Douglas was out with his

gun, and that he would not see me in the wood, and might shoot me by accident—”

Diane stopped short. She had been looking towards Grizel as she spoke, and saw her glance suddenly at Lady Douglas, and then hold up her hand as if in warning. The story of the house flashed across Diane before the words were well out of her mouth. It was all she could do to keep from bursting into a fit of tears. She could not look at Douglas, but she felt that he too turned his eyes towards his mother, and began hastily some sentence that he did not finish.

There was a dreadful moment of silence which Grizel broke by saying, with an awkward attempt at a laugh, “Guns are terribly risky things.” And then Douglas looked up and made a sign to her not to speak. “Mother,” he said quickly, “you must take Diane to see Granny to-day. You know all about Lady Beatrix,” he continued, turning to Diane. “She will be so very much interested in seeing you.” He was looking full at her with a kind smile, as if he wanted to make up to her for the pain she must have given to herself. Diane could not respond. Her cheeks burnt like fire, and she felt sure that if she raised her eyelids the imprisoned tears would roll down her face.

It hardly comforted her to hear Lady Douglas answer her son in her usual low tone, and she wished that Grizel had not gone to Douglas and patted him on the arm as if to console him. Ronald shook off her hand rather hastily, but the next moment he caught it in his own, and Diane had an intuitive perception that he was saving her from being the next to be patted and soothed and thoroughly upset by Grizel's good intentions.

Lady Douglas by this time had left the room, and Diane went into one of the recessed windows of the hall, where she stood looking out, seeing nothing, but feeling the hot flush mount to her cheeks at every fresh remembrance of her unlucky speech, and suffering such acute biting pain as only very young people experience at such a moment.

"Cruel, heartless, horrible!" she said to herself. "What can I do? Oh, how I wish I had never said it!"

Just then Douglas came into the hall by himself, and walked hastily across to where she was standing. Diane turned away her head, for the two big tears had found their way on to her cheeks by this time, but he did not even pretend not to see them.

"Diane," he began quickly, "I see what

you are thinking of, and I have come to say that I know it was a horrid bore for you ; but you must not think about it any more. Please don't."

Diane tried to thank him, but choked.

"It would not have mattered a bit if it had not been for Grizzly," he continued, very ungratefully. "It was her fault. But she always does say unlucky things, poor dear old Grizzly. Nobody minds her."

"It wasn't her," said Diane, between two sobs. "It was me."

"Well. But indeed you mustn't mind. My mother did not, I assure you. Besides, how could you tell?"

Diane felt that she was making the thing worse by seeming to attach so much importance to this, and she tried hard to recover herself, and to smile in answer to Ronald's kind, anxious look.

"It is very good of you to forgive me," she said ; "but to say that thing—to remind you—" And then she stopped short again, and coloured deeply.

But he was not looking at her this time. He was leaning out of the window. "As for that," he said presently, in an altered voice, "it is not as if one needed to be reminded—as if we ever

forgot—either my mother or I. This place is enough. I can never stand it long. Diane, it is terrible.”

Diane had quite forgotten herself, her unlucky speech, her misery of a few moments before ; all but the sudden confidence reposed in her ; all but Ronald's suppressed voice and concentrated look.

“ Oh, it must be terrible,” she said, looking up at him with her eyes brimming, and her lips quivering. He said no more, only stared out of the window ; then suddenly recovering himself with a deep sigh, he stood upright, and said to Diane, “ Would you like to come out ? We don't get such weather as this every day up here.”

She ran to get her hat. Their talk changed to every-day subjects. But the ice thus roughly broken never froze again, and both felt as they went down the steps into the sunshine, that a sudden unaccountable intimacy had sprung up between them.

There were many dogs waiting round the door as they came out, in eager expectation of Ronald's advent. Dalbraith was a great house for dogs. A smart little Dandie Dinmont terrier superintended Grizel's existence, and hardly let her out of his sight from morning till

night. Ronald was in the habit of bringing outlandish dogs home from all his travels. And here near the house-door, a very old deer-hound was generally to be found, half-blind and nearly stone-deaf, who had been a puppy in the late Lord Douglas's lifetime, and was now the only dog about the place who had known him. For this reason everybody petted the old dog, and spoke kindly to him as he lay basking in the sun on fine days, or sleeping in winter before the hall fire. He used just to wink his dim, kindly eyes, and stir his tail, as if he wished them all well, but was really too old and tired to take much trouble about them. Only if Lady Douglas passed him, he would rise stiffly and follow her across the threshold, parting from her with a deep broken bow-wow, which seemed to shake his lean old frame to its foundations.

Very different was the vehement and half-educated collie pup who now proceeded to favour Diane uninvited with his passionate, ill-regulated regard. Hitherto his affections had been a burden to him—no one wanted them. He had only lately been brought down from a sheep-farm in the hills, because he gave promise of great beauty, but it was all promise as yet and no fulfilment.

He felt that. He was aware of being

“flopperty” and unfinished. He fawned awkwardly on people and fell at their feet while soliciting their friendship, so that every one tripped over him. Poor fellow! he missed the shepherd’s children who used to carry him by the tail, and drop him about on the heather; and he missed the feeble growls of his brothers and sisters. Here he had not even a name, but was only “that there new collie pup.”

In vain he tried to force his company on Grizel and the Dandie Dinmont. Pepper became all eyes and teeth and pointed tail in an instant. In vain he offered to join the cohort of Ronald’s followers; he knew it was only on sufferance that he was permitted to canter heavily along—among them but not of them.

And yet he had known affection. Little Jamie McKillop, up yonder in the glen, had taught him to give a paw, had cuffed him and loved him, and rolled over and over with him in the straw, and on his last night at home the pup’s black satin coat had been stained by Jamie’s tears.

He was almost past puppyhood when Diane came to Dalbraith, but was still ungainly in person, and solitary as regarded his best feelings. Ronald was good-natured to him, but indifferent, and as often as not declined the paw

which it was the collie's one idea to offer those whose good opinion he so ardently coveted. "Paws off, Gawky," was the general response to his advances, and Gawky was often left sitting with his uplifted leg, wondering blankly wherein his mistake had lain.

Diane's arrival roused him into a tumult of frenzied hope. Here was some one whom no dog as yet seemed to own as his exclusive property. Not a moment was to be lost in putting in his claim. Up went Gawky's paw at minute intervals, as he sat anxiously on the floor in front of her. Diane shook it civilly many times, but scarcely knew what to make of him. He was in waiting by daybreak on her first morning, and followed her out walking with as matter of course an air as he could assume, though he knew that it imposed on none of the other dogs.

When she went up to her own room, Diane heard a heavy, rapid scuffling behind her on the stair, and presently a loud regular thumping noise against her open door. It was poor Gawky's tail. He stood on the threshold, an embodied question—head raised sideways, wistful eyes, one foot timidly advanced, "May I come in?" expressed plainly in every hair of his glossy coat.

“Oh yes; come in if you like,” Diane answered.

In a second with one great glad bound he was across the room, careering wildly round it, snuffing, leaping, shaking himself, taking proud possession of the kingdom he had won. Finally he sat down in a patch of sunshine before the window, panting, staring, smiling, with the joy of a hope fulfilled, in his great brown, pathetic, watery eyes.

“You good, dear, kind, ridiculous dog,” said Diane at last, sitting down on the floor beside him and kissing both his tan cheeks. And after that there was not a word more to be said. Gawky belonged to Diane, heart and paw, body, life, and mind.

Gawky’s was not the only heart that she had already won.

“Marion, my dear,” said Grizel, hurrying quite out of breath into the morning-room of the Lady’s Lodge, “she is coming. I stepped on to tell you, and to prepare Granny. I knew she had been uneasy; but she may set her mind at rest. She is a little gem. Talk of fine ladies!”—with scorn; “she’s just as innocent and honest a child as you could wish to see, and as for being French, why she speaks the English tongue with as pure an accent as

my own. Granny, you will feel at home with her directly. Margaret is now bringing her."

They all thought it would move Lady Beatrix somewhat to meet this girl, the grandchild of the old lover of her youth. Granny herself was a little bit excited in her quiet way, and lately she had talked much to General Douglas and to Marion of her early days, recalling old stories that her granddaughter well remembered hearing as a child, when she and Kenneth could conceive no greater pleasure than to coax Granny into telling them all the naughty things she used to do as a little French girl. There was a bright pink spot on each of her soft cheeks, as she came forward now to welcome her visitor. She took both Diane's hands in hers, and kissed her, and then she looked straight into the girl's eyes. Did some vision of those long past days come back to her just then?

When Diane had been called away to speak to Marion, Lady Beatrix looked up to Margaret, answering some unspoken question with a little tender laugh. "My dear, you can't think how long it all seems ago."

"Thank God," said Lady Douglas wearily, "for the wearing out of any sorrow;" and Granny took her hand.

"Nay, my dear; rather thank God for a

quiet heart, and for the light that comes in the evening."

From the first day of their meeting Ronald's mother had taken a strong hold on Diane's imagination. She could not help watching the pale woman, who had the sternness of a fixed and solitary sorrow in her face. There was something striking and tragic in her tall figure, and slow gliding step, her long white hands, and in the voice which must once have been so often choked by tears, that it had sunk beneath its natural key. And her manner to her son puzzled Diane, as indeed did his to her. On his side a courtesy, a sort of measured civility that it was painful and unnatural to watch (especially as Diane felt instinctively how far from formal was his natural manner)—on her side, a weary coldness and distance, that might either have caused, or been caused, by his ways with her.

And yet by-and-bye Diane, quietly watching with her quick eyes, began dimly to discern what at first she had entirely failed to see,—that Lord Douglas at least loved his mother. She was not so soon certain about her. Sometimes her eyes rested with a look—was it of wistfulness? on his face. Sometimes she seemed to

be listening for his voice ; once or twice when Grizel spoke of him with loving praise, a slight smile, like a glint of winter sunshine, just stirred her lips. That was all.

But of the son's feelings Diane had but little doubt, man of few words as he was. She knew them by his voice, by his eyes, by an indescribable ripple of feeling that passed over his face when she spoke to him in her cold voice, or seemed to shrink back from him.

Gathering up, little by little, and by slow degrees, the history of the household, the girl grew to understand what at first had only thrilled her with a vague sympathy.

Grizel and she became great friends ; one was never tired of telling—the other of hearing the fateful story of the past. It might perhaps have been more intelligible if Grizel could have made up her mind to allow that any one had ever been to blame. But such treason to her creed she was quite incapable of, and she was ready to quarrel seriously with Diane if by a chance word or look, or even gesture, she implied a shadow of disapproval. “Was it not most natural that Margaret should shrink back when she could never see her son without remembering everything ? Who could expect it to be otherwise ?”

“Ah, child,” she would add, “you never knew my cousin, the good Lord Douglas; you never saw poor Margaret in her blithe days. You never witnessed that all-absorbing love,—how can you understand?” Then a moment afterwards: “It was a sore misfortune, the blow that crushed this house, but it was no fault of Ronald’s. Who would have the heart to think any but pitiful thoughts of the poor laddie?—or who can wonder that the sorrow and the coldness drove him away from home, and led him (I can’t deny it) into ways that he should never have taken. But, Diane, never throw a stone at Ronald. You cannot guess what his young life has been.”

And Diane listened, spell-bound, to the first romance in real life that had ever crossed her path. She brooded over it, acting over again in her fancy the scenes she heard described, till her heart was filled with a great longing to console. Sometimes she went up to Lady Douglas and silently kissed her hand. Margaret looked at her, half surprised, at first. But in a little while she smiled at the young earnest face, and sometimes held the girl’s hand caressingly for a moment. She was beginning to feel that a sunbeam had slipped unawares into the old house.

Coming home from the hills towards dusk one evening, Ronald was met in the hall by Grizel, who was in a wonderful commotion of excitement. "Whist, my dear. Do not make a sound—you might stop her. Hearken, Ronald,—did you ever hear anything so sweet? Your mother is listening. Step softly. This way, Ronald. You shall see your dear mother listening, she hasn't stirred for half-an-hour. She likes it. I know she does. Hush!" and she motioned to him to stand in the shadow of the door-way, and to look in.

Lady Douglas sat in an attitude of intense listening, and Diane was singing to her.

No one but those who had witnessed the joylessness of those long years, could have understood Grizel's emotion. She could have knelt to kiss the feet of this young girl, who had brought the first ray of peaceful pleasure into the darkened life. Ronald himself stood looking in, and listening with an odd, keen thrill of mingled feelings. Quite unconscious of the good cousin's agitation, Diane went on singing, in the twilight, one thing after another—now and then stopping to think what should come next, and playing a few dreamy bars and chords, then breaking again into one of the songs she loved—'people's songs' generally;

wistful German ballads, or 'canti popolari' picked up by ear from the fishermen and cab-drivers of Naples or Florence—quaint sunshiny music, that brought with it the thought of vineyards and olive-groves.

Grizel exulted in their careless gaiety. In her young days songs used to be all about moonlight and despair, and told only of the sorrow or the inconstancy of lovers. Diane's heroes fell in love too, but they were homely and practical fellows—they ate 'polenta,' and went to market, and made themselves smart for the festa, that their little Bianchinas and Morettinas might admire them as they passed singing under the windows, down the sunny road.

Old Miss Montrose was right in telling them that they would only have the half of Diane without her music. It grew to be a custom that she should sing every evening in the gloaming, and often too at other times.

Soon she caught up the pathetic old Scottish airs, and once more the braes and glens round Dalbraith, echoed to long-forgotten passionate entreaties that 'bonnie Charlie' would come back to his own. It was but as the worship of a dead faith. No one cared or remembered. The people that she passed smiled at the bit

lassie with her blithesome voice, but the 'cause' lived no longer in their hearts. Only Lady Beatrix's face brightened at the once familiar strains, and the minister, Angus Maclean, pricked up his ears when the saucy voice sent the words ringing to his ears :

"Come o'er the stream, Charlie, brave Charlie, dear Charlie,
Come o'er the stream, Charlie, and dine wi' Maclean."

"'Tis a grand gift," said the good man to General Douglas, after listening in silence for half-an-hour ; "'tis a grand gift, yon gift of song."

"Yes," answered the General. "The little maid has a rare voice, and sings well for so young a creature. But she has had a serious musical education in Italy."

In his secret heart he thought Diane's voice the loveliest thing that had ever been heard, but in virtue of his prior acquaintance with her in London, the General had put on a quaint deprecating air of ownership, accepting all praises of her modestly, as if they were compliments paid to a curious work of art, which he had produced himself. "Yes, I am glad you are pleased. I felt convinced you would think as I did. Of course she is very young, and we must not look for too much at her time of life ; but still, yes—well, my dear Margaret, I own I agree with you.

I think there is a charm. I believe I mentioned that old Miss Montrose pronounced her to be full of talent and power."

"Poor child!" said Lady Douglas, "one wonders what her future life will be."

General Douglas was delighted. It was long, as he said afterwards to Marion, since poor Margaret had been roused to even so slight an expression of interest in outward things.

"Mark my word, Marion," he said, "God has sent this young thing to us with a blessing in her hand."

There was no one who rejoiced more ungrudgingly than did Marion, that the tasks she had once hoped to fulfil, should pass now into the hands of another. It was not only circumstances, she said to herself humbly, that had taken the power away from her; here was one who was far fitter for such work. She remembered how, from very reverence for her great sorrow, she used to approach Lady Douglas in fear and awe. There was ever a constraint between them, but Diane seemed to have no fears; she went on her way with a singular straightforward simplicity, never thinking of herself.

Perhaps the difference between the two girls lay in this, that whereas Marion was full of an

earnest longing after self-sacrifice, Diane never thought about it, but lived for others just simply for the joy it gave her, and for the love she bore them.

Which was the highest? Diane's unconscious motto was Love and Joy. Marion's, Duty and Self-denial.

CHAPTER VII.

CROSSING THE FORD.

“ He pu’d me the cranberry ripe frae the boggy fen ;
He pu’d me the strawberry red frae the foggy glen ;
He pu’d me the rowan frae the wild steep sae giddy, O,
Sae loving and kind was my dear Hieland laddie, O.”

KENNETH DOUGLAS had been spending his furlough in shooting tigers in the valley of Dehra Doon, much to his satisfaction. He ended the expedition, however, by catching a jungle fever, of which he lay for some time dangerously ill. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered to be moved, Sir Charles Stuart was resolved to send him home on sick-leave to Scotland.

He had passed an anxious time of it while his kinsman and aide-de-camp struggled through the crisis of his illness. “ That’s the worst,” he grumbled, “ of having relations on one’s staff ; you never have a day’s peace, but are forced to be for ever thinking of their fathers, or their grandmothers, or the girls they

want to marry. I never will be caught doing such a thing again. Now there's Norman Douglas would have been terribly cut up if this lad had died, not to mention Marion, unless, by-the-by, she has changed her mind a second time."

"Are you and Marion engaged now, may I be allowed to inquire?" he asked abruptly, stopping after he had bidden the homeward-bound invalid farewell on the day of his departure.

"In a sort of a way we are," answered Kenneth, looking up rather anxiously.

"I hate your 'sort of ways.' What is it you mean? Let us know where we are, one way or another. Has she refused you?"

"No," replied Kenneth with a half-smile.

"Then she has accepted you, I presume?"

"She will, I hope, when I see her again."

"I thought she had thrown over Douglas for your sake. I don't pretend to make the whole story out, and it seems to me that both you and she behaved as ill as possible, but I certainly believed you had come to an understanding."

"Marion behaved splendidly," said Kenneth, "and of course we understand each other."

"Oh, you do? then are you going to be married, I should like to know?"

“Do you give your consent?” asked Kenneth eagerly, in return.

“I wash my hands of it all, as I told you before. I can’t attempt to look after Marion at this distance. Her grandmother and your father must do as they see fit. The last time I was at home they plagued me out of my life for my consent, and then directly I had been badgered into giving it, they wrote to tell me it was not wanted. The whole thing is a mystery to me. They may do without my consent this time.”

Kenneth pondered a little.

“I tell you fairly, Sir Charles, that I know Marion likes me, but I am not so sure that she will marry me. I can’t stand the suspense of it all. It is the one thing I am going home to find out.”

“You are going home because you have had a fever, as I understand it,” said Sir Charles sharply. “What follies you may commit when you get there is no business of mine. I have no doubt you will go your own way in spite of my advice. Well, good-bye to you,” and so saying he shook hands with the young man once more, and left him.

He had grown rather fond of his aide-de-camp, who was a good officer and devoted to

the scientific part of his profession. They did not become intimate—it was not Sir Charles's way. Never was there a less domestic man, or one who had smaller need of wife and child. That a soldier had no business with such luxuries, was one of his unalterable maxims, and it was with more than contentment that he left Marion to her grandmother's guardianship. However, his sense of duty was strong, and when he was on the spot, he had done his best to keep her from a hasty marriage, which was the more to his credit as he secretly dreaded the day when the charge of his daughter might be thrown into his hands. The event had proved his wisdom. That engagement soon came to an end, and it now appeared that Kenneth was the man she liked. Well, selfishly speaking, he should not be sorry to know that the child had a home and a husband of her own. The idea just softened the asperity with which he would otherwise have contemplated his aide-de-camp's spoiling his military prospects, by any such mistaken step.

Kenneth reappeared in England after an absence of two and a half years; six months or so after Diane de Beaurepaire came to Dalbraith. Time had not been standing still for any of

them, though just now it moved with light and swift footsteps, as if not caring that people should mark the silent changes it was working as it stole along. There are seasons when no one wishes to question what a day may bring forth. Kenneth and Marion fell insensibly into the spirit of the hour, enjoying the strange consciousness of being together, and of belonging to each other, without trying for the moment to look far into the future. Indeed Kenneth hardly dared to speak of it to her, and she was glad to wait.

It was, perhaps, the same with others. New ways and new customs had slipped in very quietly and naturally. Perhaps only to someone who was able to look back and compare the past time with the present, would it be possible to realize how "the old order changeth, giveth place to new."

The name of Diane, a new one to Kenneth except in letters, was on the lips of all as a household word. There was nothing strange now to the dwellers at Dalbraith in the sound of a light footstep running up and down the stair—in a little burst of happy laughter, or a scrap of song floating out of the old rooms. Douglas had grown used to looking round for her whenever he came in. He at least knew what a

difference it made to know that he might find her curled up daintily in one of the deep recesses of the window, with Gawky at her feet, and a book in her hand, or else buried in the mazes of her Italian needlework.

They were constantly together. Grizel, cumbered with much serving, left "Nanie" (as she Scotticized the girl's French name) for many hours to her own devices. It had soon become a custom that Ronald should take her with him to the hill-side or the river. Sometimes he walked beside her shaggy pony. Sometimes he let her climb steep craigs where, he assured her, only the goats and a few herd boys had ever been before her. Often a plaid was spread for her on the warm heather under some friendly rock, and the caller air laden with the scent of wild thyme and bog myrtle blew softly round her, and it would all have seemed too like Paradise, she said, if it had not been for the midges.

Little bare-footed, rough-haired children often gathered round her, attracted by her gestures and sunshiny smiles. She made them understand her somehow, though they could speak nothing but Gaelic; but children have an universal language of their own, Douglas told her—and what was she but a child? She

had all a child's love for listening to stories, and Douglas ransacked his memory for tales of the Fairy glen, and for all the marvellous legends which Grizel used to tell him when he was a boy. He even took Diane to visit old Luckie Rintoul, the Sybil of the village, whom some people affirmed to be a witch. There he found her one day, half-scared, half-pleased, sitting in the smoke, over the fire in the middle of the hut, while the old woman repeated to her the prophecy that used to be called the Doom of Dalbraith. Luckie "had the English," and had been down south to Glasgow once, but Ronald looked rather vexed when he heard the old words that had once made him so uncomfortable slowly and clearly rehearsed for Diane's benefit. The red hand, the kinsman's blood, the lassie from the East—what queer memories it brought back.

"Do not speak of that prophecy to Grizel," he said to Diane, in a constrained voice, "she would not like it."

"Does she know it? does she believe it?" asked Diane eagerly.

"She used."

"But why does she dislike it?" persisted Diane; "what can it all mean?"

"I am the one son of the good father,"

answered Douglas, after a minute's hesitation ;
“ and you know, Diane, how my hand is dyed.”

“ Douglas !” she exclaimed ; and then she stopped short.

In those days he told her almost the whole story of his life. A silent reticent man, used to solitude, and very chary of his words, he yielded now without question to the charm that led him on. Even in his best days with Marion, he said little, and had never spoken about himself except by a great effort. He had turned to her deliberately, hoping to find happiness and rest, but from Diane he could not keep himself away. He might have thought that such a child as she was, could understand but little of a strong man's life, but in fact he never reasoned about it. He only knew that she was Diane. It was an overpowering feeling that could move away the stone, under the seal of which he had kept the spring of emotion so long imprisoned by an iron force, but when her hand smote the rock the water streamed out.

He took her one day to the island in the loch, cypress-shaded and rock-bound, which was the old burial-place of his family. There, within the ruined walls of an old chapelry, was his father's grave—and the grave of his own

boyhood. There they had brought him—the good Lord Douglas—on a summer's day, with coronachs and dirges, and the sound of slow-dipping oars, and had laid him to rest in a fair place, beside his fathers. And his young son leaving him there, went away to take up the burden of a spoiled life. Diane might be a child, but she understood all this as no one in the world had ever understood it before, and Ronald knew that.

A month or two after this he moored the boat one evening under the shadow of a wooded hill, and asked Diane to come on shore with him. Hardly speaking he led the way up a winding path, and through a copse of birch-wood. Then he turned, and took her hand, leading her to where, on the borders of the wood, there was a carpet of red heather, and a tangle of fern, and a drooping rowan-tree. He stood still. Diane trembled—she knew instinctively where she was. There was a roughly-piled cairn beneath the trees just where Lord Douglas had fallen. Such a sunshiny, peaceful spot, with the dun moor rising up beyond! He bared his head, and Diane sank upon her knees.

After a time he said in a hushed voice, “I have never been here with a living soul before,

but I wanted to bring you once, and I wish you to throw a stone upon the cairn."

She obeyed. The scene rose vividly before her eyes—the trampled heather, the dying father, the boy's white face, the rough, weeping men. It was a sadder place by far than the island burying-ground. None of the country people ever passed near, without adding a stone to the grey memorial pile. It was to them a sacred spot, like what one of their way-side chapels is to a Tyrolese. Few came near it now; the lower stones of the cairn were overgrown with moss.

Diane attempted no words. Common-place sympathy would have jarred upon them both; she knew that in bringing her here he had admitted her into the inner sanctuary of his thoughts. By-and-by she rose from her knees, and stepping softly, went to gather a drooping scarlet-berried branch from the rowan-tree. He broke one off, and put it silently into her hand. It seemed strange to neither of them when that evening, almost for the first time, he poured out his heart in vehement words.

"Diane, did you ever think what it was to lose one's happiness at sixteen? I am not going to say I never had another happy moment. I have heard people say comfortably

that if so and so happened they should never be happy again. Do you suppose they at all realize what they say? Life is long—long; if it is to be all pain it becomes a serious business. But I tell you there have been moments in my life when I have forgotten everything, and been causelessly, madly happy. The wear and the gnaw all ceased for the time. Good heavens, what that was! But I don't suppose since that day I have ever had an hour of commonplace, every-day ease. No, no; it was burnt into me—branded in with a hot iron—not the act itself, but its results. I learnt then, how in this random world one must judge and be judged by consequences; how it is not always sin, but misfortune too, that can stand like an angel with a flaming sword at the gate of one's Paradise. God knows!—if suffering could have condoned one miserable deed, if having one's youth seared and scarred and ruined would have availed anything, I could have stood free before God and man once more.

“But I am talking nonsense; only you are patient, Diane. What is done is done—only never visit those whom God has stricken, too heavily. I think He knows what can be borne, and all that goes beyond, is evil and against His will.

“I believe I could have outlived the sharp agony of that time. God knows how unwittingly I caused my dear father’s death—and he knows. I never doubted that from the Heaven where my hand had sent him, he looked down on me and pitied me. But my mother, my poor mother!—Never think I blame her; it was all natural; only it ruined me. The grief that turned her against me, and her horror, drove me wild. Poor mother, how she loved him! How she hated grief, and fought against it, and turned in her heart against me, poor wretch, who had forced it on to her! She might have saved me then. When I remember what it was to see her shrink away, I sometimes think she has almost been avenged. But, Diane,” and he passed his hands over his eyes, “I never meant to speak like this. I don’t know what I have been saying. Don’t look at me with that pitying little face. Remember, I don’t blame my mother. Even if I have seemed to do so in words, I do not in my heart. Don’t let us talk of this again.”

And he never did. It was the one outburst of a long pent-up bitterness, but his was not a nature to be relieved by oft-repeated complaints. Diane herself, from the calmness of every-day life, grew to look back upon those vehement,

broken sentences almost like a dream. She used to look round sometimes. There seemed to be no tragic elements among those quiet people, whose evening gatherings two or three at least, out of the five assembled, enjoyed so much. There was the open piano with her music tumbling about. Grizel, spectacles on nose, nodding over her "seam." Lady Douglas absently beating time with her slender hand to the music, or else reading in her accustomed corner. The General with his legs crossed rustling the newspaper. Douglas leaning his chin on his hand, his eyes fixed on the chess-board, at the opposite side of which she herself would be sitting.

Diane, it must be confessed, lost her temper terribly over those games of chess. It was a bad trait in her character that she could not bear to be beaten, and her antagonist, well aware of this, never allowed her to win a single game.

All this time Douglas did not for a moment forget the fact, that he was in some sort the guardian of this girl, and that he had given his word never to let her marry a man who had been a gambler. He began to talk vaguely of going abroad again. But he lingered. He might surely stand in this soft sunshine a little

longer, and then he would take his shadow out of her path, and go his way.

She would be sorry for a time to lose her friend, but life must have some great prize in store for such an one as she was, and it would not harm her to have been the one unconscious star of a dark life.

She need not even know that it was a real parting, when he left her.

"Do not sing that, Diane," he said to her one evening, coming up to the piano, "I do not like it."

She paused, and looked at him with widely-opened eyes. "Not like it! Why it is Schubert's *Addio*," she answered, in a shocked voice.

"That may be. I don't care for '*Addios*,' nor for any 'lilt of dule and sorrow.' Sing one of your heartless little Swabian songs, about blowing the horn and being lusty hunters."

She lifted her eyebrows, and broke out saucily into a lively German air, to which he nodded approbation, until it fell into the minor key, and ended with '*Adè, Adè, ja scheiden und meiden thut weh.*'

"There you are again. I won't have it," and he put his finger under her wrist, and lifted it up.

“Nanie,” called out Grizel, “sing that pretty song again, that sounds like ‘Begone, dull care,’ with a wail at the end.”

Diane triumphantly complied. Douglas remained leaning over the piano.

“I don’t like farewells,” he said, when she had sung it through a second time to the last verse. “They are too melancholy. My notion is that friends who have cared about each other ought to part, if part they must, silently, without last looks and speeches, trusting one another.”

“I should not like that,” said Diane, striking one or two soft chords and looking down.

“Some partings are hard,” Ronald went on; “at least one of the two friends ought to be saved from knowing it is the last look. I remember hearing, or reading, of two men who had been thrown together for a while in India, and who had grown to love each other well. But the time came when their paths in life fell asunder again, and they had to part. Each was bound to his work. One had to go on his way up the country, and the other, who had travelled with him for a part of his journey, was obliged to turn back to his post. One was a Frenchman, and the other an Englishman. For a few days more they journeyed on together,

and at night pitched their tents side by side, but they knew that the parting was coming. And then, one morning, the Frenchman got up very early, and looked out of his door, but the other tent had disappeared. Silently, in the night, his friend had gone his way, taking the pain of the leave-taking on himself."

"Did they ever meet again?" asked Diane in a low voice.

"Who knows?" answered Douglas. "Very likely not; the story ends there. Will you sing us one more song before you go to bed?"

The weather in September was very rough and stormy; wind and clouds and driving mist being the order of the day, and only now and then the sun shone out in streams of rainy gold. Diane was growing almost as hardy as Marion. Dressed in her short red petticoat and plaid, she was sublimely indifferent to wind and weather, rather exulting in a rough buffeting from the autumn gales.

One day, which had promised fairer weather than usual, the two girls went a long way up the hills with Douglas and the General. An old shepherd was lying sick in his hut on the mountain-side, and wanted to see Ronald or his uncle. He was an old friend of Marion's, and

when Diane found they were all going, she begged pathetically not to be left behind.

Before they started Douglas was in his mother's room, settling some business with her. In the course of it he said something about going abroad.

"You do not surely think of going abroad again?" she asked.

"Indeed I think of it," he said.

"In that case, you are very wrong."

"Why, mother?"

For once she hesitated, looking down and twisting her handkerchief nervously round her wrist. Then she looked at him steadily, and said, "Because I have a hope that this may be the beginning of a new era in your life."

"Will you tell me what you mean?" he asked in a low voice.

"I think you guess."

"If so, will you put my guess into words for me?"

He stood in the window, with his head half turned away from her. They never wasted words in their intercourse, this mother and son. She only answered him now by one word, and that word, a name.

He could not hear it unmoved, and though

he did not change his attitude she saw the colour deepen slowly in his face.

“ Well, mother, what of Diane ? ” he asked, his voice just stopping and softening over the name.

“ What of Diane ? ” she repeated. “ I don’t think there can be much need for you to ask. But if you don’t wish to discuss this subject with me, tell me so plainly, and I will say no more. I do not want to force your confidence.”

“ I only wish that we should understand each other, and so I beg you to tell me what you mean.”

“ Just this, then. That I look on her as your hope for a new life, as the great and marvellous blessing that God has in His mercy put within your reach.”

She spoke quickly and eagerly, with an energy that was quite unlike herself ; the colour came all over her face, but it had time to ebb away again before she heard Ronald’s low steady voice in answer.

“ Mother, I have no right to think of her like that.”

“ No right ? ” she got up hastily and put her hand on his arm. “ No right, Douglas ! ”

“ No, none.”

“ And yet I am sure you love her.”

She did not need any answer besides the quick involuntary one that she read plainly enough in his face, and he gave her no other.

“But, Douglas,” she said, resuming her quiet manner, “I must ask you to give me an explanation, for Diane’s sake.”

“Most willingly,” he answered sadly, “for Diane’s sake.” He sighed. “I did hope that you would not want all these explanations. You cannot have forgotten.”

“Forgotten what?”

“The letter I wrote to you from Genoa after her father died.”

She started. “I hardly see what we have to do with that just now.”

“Do not you? I wish I did not see.”

She stood thinking, and then said: “It was not quite honest of me to say that. I believe I do know how you think it affects us now, but,” hesitating, “I do not think it should—I do not think it need.”

“And yet I gave you his message, and his charge.”

“Yes.”

“And do you think, honestly, mother, that in his eyes, and by the standard he set up, I should have a right to marry Diane?”

"But you are changed ; it was long ago ; you are different, and I—"

"I said by his standard, not by yours."

She sat down and covered her face with her hands. Several minutes passed, and then he said, "I am waiting for your sentence."

Lady Douglas looked up. "I *cannot* say that in that sense you have a right to ask her."

He gave a short half laugh. "I knew that," he said, turning away.

The tears were standing in her eyes ; her face worked and her hands shook. She looked as if in those few minutes she had been through an exhausting struggle. He saw it, and coming back, took her hand and put it gently to his lips. "It is no fault of yours, mother. Long ago I sentenced and condemned myself."

"You are not a gambler."

"I know that ; I could trust myself ; and if I had seen her at that time, nothing on earth should have induced me to give such a promise ; but he was dying, and I could not cross him ; it did not seem to matter much—and all things go against one sometimes."

It was years since the mother and son had seemed so near together. She was still holding his hand ; suddenly she drew it hurriedly away.

“ But Diane, Douglas ; have you no thought all this time for her ? Has it never struck you that this falls most cruelly on her ? ”

“ How, cruelly ? She need never know of this ; ” but he grew quite pale.

“ Have you not been for ever with her since she came ? Did you ever keep away from her ? Poor child, poor little Diane ! how was she to guess that there was a gulf between you, that you did not mean to cross ? Have you been so blind and so selfish ? Have you never watched her face, and seen—oh, how glad I have been to see it !—how bitterly sorry I am now.”

“ Mother,” his voice sank to a whisper, “ I give you my solemn word I never dreamt of harm to her.”

“ I dare say not,” she answered a little more quietly. “ I believe men seldom think. I dare say it may have been ignorance on your part ; but sometimes ignorance is very cruel.”

He made no answer. Another voice was ringing in his ears, carrying with it such an agony of love, of hopeless longing, of remorse, unwilling joy and tender pity, that it made him deaf to any outward sound.

It was absolutely true that he had believed a good woman's love was a thing beyond his power to gain. His experience had been very

bitter. He had forfeited, to all appearance, his mother's affection; Marion had turned away from him to Kenneth; he had become used to loneliness; it had never seemed possible that the love of this woman, who was to him above all women, should be granted to him. But he knew now that it was so; it flashed upon him with a swift conviction—and it behoved him to put away from him for a time all the pain, all the longing, the knowledge brought to himself, and to think only of what was best for her.

“Mother,” he said at last, “if you are right in this, you cannot speak of me too harshly; but tell me only what I had better do for her.” He paused, then went on, as if he was lifted quite out of himself and his reserve, so that he scarcely knew whom he was addressing. “When I found out, long ago, what she was to me, I only thought of her as fenced in and hedged safely from me by her father's wishes. It was a misfortune; but when I acknowledged to myself that I must not hope to win her, I knew at the same time that my love was given past recall, and I was content (though I see now that it was selfish) to take on me the burden of a life-long silent love. For I knew that she blessed and made me better by her very

presence; and some day, if there were difficulties in her life, I hoped that I might be trusted by her, and might be so happy as to clear the thorns from her path, and then to leave her, glad that she was happy, and far happier myself for having known her. But now—”

Lady Douglas could not help being touched.

“Oh!” she said; “if only we could undo your past.”

He looked up at her quickly, as if about to speak, but checked himself.

“I had better go away,” he said. “Until I do—”

“Douglas,” called a merry impatient voice from under the window; and at the same moment Grizel knocked at the door.

“Margaret, my dear, I beg your pardon; but if you keep Ronald much longer, the General will be fairly out of patience. They trysted him at the Lady’s Lodge half-an-hour ago, and the days draw in so quickly now. Nanie is just daft to be off. You have a long way to go, Ronald.”

“I am coming, Grizel. Mother,” he added in a lower voice, “I shall leave it all for this one day.”

“Diane shall not be disappointed, one need

not think," he said to himself, as he ran downstairs; "just this once more."

It was rather a rough expedition, for there was scarcely a sheep-path after they reached the head of the glen; the burns were swollen by the late rains, and little impromptu streamlets trickled down the hill-side. Everywhere was the bubbling sound of water, with an undertone of distant torrents roaring hoarsely, and of wind upon the moor. However, the couple of shaggy ponies they had with them scrambled like goats over the rocks, and every now and then a turn in the track opened to them a fresh sight of the broken mountain ridge, luridly purple, and backed by glints of pale light in a black sky.

It was later than they expected when they reached the hut, and the broken clouds were gathering again. "The fact is that we had no business to bring you two children," said General Douglas. "There is a storm coming, and I don't know how to get you home." But Marion and Diane hopped off their ponies and ran into the hut, laughing and rejoicing in its being far too late for any one to repent. If Douglas was more silent than usual, the others were too much occupied to notice it.

The old Highlander was not so ill as they

expected; he was quite well enough to be ready for a "crack;" and what with the difficulty of blowing up his damp peats into a satisfactory blaze, and his long Gaelic "confab" with the General, and the desolate grandeur of the view from his door, they dawdled until a heavy storm broke and delayed them still longer.

"What a place for a man to live alone," said Diane, almost awe-struck as she stood listening to the moan of the wind, and watching it drive the rain hither and thither in gusts against the hills; a sea of rocky peaks and bare craigs rose above and beneath the hut, and far away the veritable sea stretched grey and uneasy under the storm-clouds.

"Almost like living in a lighthouse out at sea," said Ronald; "but since his wife died, this old fellow has insisted on staying here by himself. There is a herd-boy grandson comes sometimes to look him up. He doesn't mind. See, the storm is drifting away to eastward."

By-and-by the rain subsided into a drizzling mist, and the party set off homewards. But when they were nearly half way they found their path flooded by the overflow of a muddy burn, and a waterfall tumbling merrily down the hill.

There was nothing for it but to make a round of two or three miles over a morass, and across a swamp of drenched moss and blaeberry bushes. The clouded daylight had all but faded, before they struck their path again. Down came a fresh torrent of rain, bringing more self-reproaches from the General, who took refuge in scolding Douglas. "You ought not to have proposed bringing Diane on a day like this," he said; "it is bad enough even for Marion who is to the manner born, but Diane will catch her death of cold, and be blown off her pony."

"We shall be all right presently. I'll take care, Uncle Norman," answered Douglas, who was splashing along by the side of Diane's small rough steed. The little storm-beaten face into which he allowed himself an occasional glance, with its cheeks reddened by the wind and eye-lashes all wet with rain-drops, gave no token of giving in.

"It's only 'a bit saft,' General Douglas," she called out in her very best Scotch.

"I wonder how Kenneth is getting on," pursued the General. "It was all very well your promising to meet him at the ford, Marion, provided he keeps his time; but I shall take you straight on home if he isn't there. I can't

have you kept waiting for any one on such a night as this is going to be."

"I dare say he will be there before us," answered Marion; "he has a better road than we have."

When Kenneth that morning had started off grumbling, on a duty visit to some distant neighbours, whose son he knew in India, a meeting had been fixed with him at a certain ford he had to cross, about two miles from Dalbraith, that he might at least join in the fag end of the expedition.

At last they reached the ford. It was quite dark, and a torrent was tearing down the glen, raving over the stones, and flashing gleams of white out of the darkness from its swirls of foam.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Ronald; "Kenneth will have to look out how he crosses the ford to-night. I wonder if he is over!"

There was a rough shieling built of peat and fir-branches, close to the road-side, and two boys were standing in front of it, stopped on their way home from school, by the disappearance of the accustomed stepping-stones. Water up to their waists would not have troubled them; but this strong, tossing river was too much for them. They had waded in a little way,

but wisely turned back before they quite lost their footing. Hardy and "feckless," and without much concern how they were to get home that night, they had busied themselves in building a great bonfire of the blown down pine branches that lay about, to warm themselves, and it was blazing up brightly by this time, and casting a red glare over the water.

The road to Loch Dalbraith branched off at right angles from the ford. There was no question of crossing it for the party from the hills; but as the rain was coming down more furiously than ever, a halt was called in front of the ruddy blaze, and Marion and Diane were told to go under the shelter of the shed for a little while.

Kenneth had not passed. The boys had been here for a couple of hours, and not a soul had they seen.

"I wish we might stay till he comes," whispered Marion. "I have never seen the river so high. It really looks dangerous."

"We must and will stay," answered Diane resolutely. "Never fear, Marion, they shan't get me on to my pony again, until Kenneth is across."

"He is safe enough if he takes care and keeps up stream," Ronald was saying to his

uncle. "This bonfire was not a bad notion. We will keep it going to give him the right direction, and I will wait and see him over."

"We are all going to wait," said Diane, coming out of the shed into the light of the blaze, a picturesque gipsy figure, with a scarlet handkerchief bound over her roughened hair, for her hat had departed on the wings of the wind.

"Well, well, well, well," said the General, holding up his hands; "you are a set of mad people." But he did not very much object for his own part, to waiting to see Kenneth on the right side of the ford.

For half an hour they waited, drying their drenched clothes at the fire, and feeding it with fir-wood and pine-cones, and with some of the dried heather that thatched the shed.

Then they heard the distant sound of fast-trotting horse's hoofs.

"He is coming," said Ronald; and they all hurried to the edge of the stream as Kenneth rode up and halted on the other side. They could barely make out the outline of the pony and its rider in the darkness; the red glare that stretched half across the river dazzled their eyes still more.

Douglas made his hands into a trumpet and shouted directions to his cousin; but the wind

fairly drowned his voice, and carried the words in another direction.

They just heard Kenneth shout back, and then he rode down into the water.

"He is all right," said Ronald to Marion. "He has only to keep up against the stream. The water is not very deep just here, even now; the pony knows well enough what he is about. He would only get the full force of the current lower down. The river deepens suddenly—Hallo!—Kenneth, keep up! keep up!"

The last words were shouted at the full pitch of his voice, but there was no knowing whether they reached Kenneth's ears or not. As the pony came wading on into the circle of light, they saw that he was going in a slanting direction, down stream instead of up. Then all at once he stumbled—staggered—seemed to lose his footing; there was a confused black mass struggling for a moment in the water, and then it was swept on out of the light.

Douglas had thrown off his coat.

"I think he must have got a blow," he said. "We can manage, Marion."

They saw him plunge into the swift torrent. At first he was hidden in a black pool close under the rock. When he emerged from that, the water seemed to catch him and whirl him

round once more ; then he righted himself and struck out. Just when they thought they saw him, an uprooted pine tree, its branches all nodding and tossing, came tearing down the stream, and hid him from their sight. Marion and Diane stood clasping each other.

No one uttered a sound, till suddenly there rose out of the bed of the river a strange unearthly yell—a shriek of agony. Then the two girls screamed also.

“Whist, it’ll be the horse, pair beast,” said one of the boys in an awe-struck under-tone ; and once more the shrill weird cry rose out of the river, as it hurried the poor creature swiftly out of ken.

But Kenneth—and Douglas ?

Pitch darkness where they were, and the deafening rush of water, and the wind and hissing rain. The watchers could see nothing ; could hear nothing—General Douglas had disappeared. The two boys, each snatching a flaming brand out of the fire, clambered up the rocks and tried to throw a gleam of light on to the water.

“I see him ; I see him,” shouted one.

“Where—where ?”

“See yonder ! no, ’tis the tree—ah, there—the eddy has caught him.”

A gust of wind and rain, and the blazing embers smouldered into smoke. Darkness again and silence. Then a faint distant shout—another!

In spite of their frantic efforts, Marion and Diane could make but little way over the slippery moss-covered rocks that edged the stream. Several times they had fallen; the blood was trickling from a cut on Diane's forehead, but she did not know it.

Now the boys came rushing back. "The bonfire! heap her up again; they are bringing him. He's clean gane, whatever. I saw him."

"Na, na," rejoined the other, "there's the life in him yet," and they relapsed into Gaelic, and tore down the thatch and the turf walls of the shed to pile them on the fire.

The next moment two men stepped into the light of the blaze, carrying between them Kenneth's insensible figure, his head fallen back, his hair streaming with water, his face ghastly pale.

They laid him down where the red glare fell upon him, and one of them knelt down and laid his hand upon his heart.

"He's living yet," he said, looking up. "My Lord hasna a' but laid doun his life in vain."

"Is Douglas drowned?" asked Diane, staring at them in a bewildered way.

"Guid guide us; no. The Lord forbid," answered the familiar voice of Duncan the fisherman. "He's a bit exhausted, but he lies on the bank yonder wi' the General. There's no' ane but himsel' could ha'e done it, wi' the river in spate as she is."

It was a long time before they could bring Kenneth round. His father had hurried back, and Douglas himself, still panting heavily and almost as pale as Kenneth, was kneeling by him and chafing his limbs, long before his eyes opened with a sigh and a shudder.

By this time there was a lull in the tempest, and the rays of the moon were struggling out of a rift in the clouds. A hurried consultation took place. Duncan and two other men, waiting with the boat at the head of the loch, had fortunately become rather uneasy at the lateness of the hour, and came in search of the party. They would now land Kenneth, with Marion and the General, at the Lady's Lodge, which was the nearest point, and then take Ronald and Diane across to Dalbraith.

"My boy, I owe you more than my life," said the General, as the boat ploughed its way over the water, rocking now and then in the

windy darkness. Ronald grasped his hand without answering. It was a greater pleasure than he knew how to put into words, to have rendered a service to his uncle. The good-nights were made almost in silence, and few words were spoken either, after the landing at Lady's Lodge.

Ronald leant over and "happed" Diane afresh in Duncan's great plaid, in which she was muffled from head to foot.

"You have had a hard day, child," he said ; "are you very cold and very tired ?"

"How can one be anything in the world to-night but very grateful ?" answered Diane, almost indignantly.

"Ah,"—and presently he said—"I think you prayed to God for me."

"I don't know," she said honestly ; "it was all so quick, and I was so frightened. I said 'God keep him.'"

"Thank you, Diane," he replied quietly, "I hope He will."

"He has," she added, almost in a whisper.

CHAPTER VIII.

FAITHFUL FOUND.

“Time and tide come round to a’,
Bonnie laddie, Hieland laddie,
And upstart pride will get a fa’,
Bonnie laddie, Hieland laddie.”

It appeared the next morning that Douglas had been right in thinking Kenneth had received a blow which crippled him in the water.

The pony in its struggles, had kicked him severely in the side. A few days of care and of complete rest would in all probability put him right, the doctor said; but meanwhile he ought to be kept perfectly quiet for a time, not only on account of the blow, but of the shock to his system. He had been for some time in the cold water, and it was a risk for a man who had only half-recovered from an Indian fever.

However, he was reported to be going on very well when Ronald went over to inquire

after him in the early morning, and later in the day General Douglas left him asleep, and went with Marion to see the scene of last night's adventure, by daylight.

The river had gone down a little, but it was still sweeping along with an impetuous rush, which gave them a clearer idea than it had been possible to gain in the darkness, both of Kenneth's danger, and of the strength and courage Ronald must have needed for the rescue.

It made Marion almost giddy to look at the swollen stream. She stood by the white ashes of their last night's fire, and shivered, while they showed her the exact place where the pony must have made his first stumble. Duncan flung in a charred branch to guide her sight; it was sucked under and whirled away almost before they could see it strike the water. Then there was the rock from which Douglas made his spring into the flood; the spot where they believed he first got hold of Kenneth; and further down—so very much further down—the turn in the stream where he had succeeded by sheer strength in stemming the force of the current, and in bringing his almost insensible prize to land.

General Douglas was overflowing with devout

thanksgiving, in which Marion strove to join with her whole heart. But all the time an undefined dread was weighing on her, a kind of conviction that the consequences of the accident had not ended on the previous night. Something was coming; she could not tell what—something that kept her senses keenly alive, and prevented her from yielding to the weariness that oppressed her after yesterday's terror and fatigue. It was a strange turn in the wheel of fortune, that had made Kenneth a debtor to his cousin for his life. Every fresh tribute to Ronald's courage, and to the danger he had run, was a new burden on her. She could hardly stand by while Duncan and her uncle talked, or listen patiently to their praises of Lord Douglas, who, however unwittingly, seemed to her to have been heaping coals of fire on Kenneth's head. She knew she was horribly ungrateful, but she could not help herself.

When they returned home, and General Douglas had gone back to his son's room, Marion went and sat by herself on a turf bench in the orchard. She was too restless to stay with Granny—too tired to do anything rational. She was fit for nothing but to wait, gazing dreamily at the few red-cheeked

apples that were still hanging on the branches before her; what she was waiting for she did not know. Before long, weariness gained the mastery over her, and with her head leaning against the gnarled stem of a hoary old fruit-tree, she fell fast asleep. The sound of twigs snapping under an approaching step, roused her by-and-by. Looking up with a start, she saw General Douglas standing before her, and knew that her presentiment had come true.

"Marion," he began, "I want you to tell me what this means?" and he held out to her a torn envelope, on the back of which a few sentences were scrawled in pencil. She read these words:—

"It must all be told now, Marion, after what R. has done. Will you tell my father for me? Say anything you please. I leave all to you—only speak soon."

"Did Kenneth send this?" she asked, turning it over and over in a confused way. "When?"

"Just now. I have been telling him how it all happened last night. He remembers very little about it; but he seemed greatly moved at hearing how nearly Ronald lost his life in saving him. I was afraid he would over-excite himself. Then he insisted on writing this for

you. He is certainly in a feverish and agitated state."

"I thought he was going on so well," said Marion, but she scarcely knew what she was saying.

"I believe he is, in essentials; but now, Marion, tell me at once what all this is about? Of all things in the world I dislike a mystery."

"It is so sudden," stammered Marion. "I don't know what to say. Give me a little time."

"Nonsense, Marion; speak out, and have done with it. Kenneth might have had confidence in me. It can be nothing very serious I should hope. He is in some scrape. What is it—money?"

"Oh, no, no; I wish it were."

"Well," he said quietly, "don't distress yourself, but speak as soon as you are able. I am waiting."

Marion did not even hear him. Was it possible, that after all that had come and gone the telling of this secret had fallen upon her? She knew there was no escape. She knew that quietly as her uncle stood there waiting, he was not to be turned now from his purpose. She knew she ought to be glad, but her heart failed her utterly.

"Marion," he said again, with an elaborate patience in his voice that betokened no relenting, "do not be so alarmed; no one will think of reproaching you in any way."

"Oh, Uncle Norman," she said, almost smiling. As if blame to herself was the thing she dreaded.

"I do not think," she added, "that you are the least prepared for the sort of thing Kenneth wants to tell you."

"I don't care for preparation," he replied. "Tell me in two words."

"That is impossible. Will you be very patient, Uncle Norman?"

Half an hour afterwards the whole was told. The General was sitting with his hands clasped over his brow, and his elbows supported by his knees. He had assumed that attitude when he saw that his broken words, his look of horror, and the lightning gleam in his eyes, so paralyzed Marion that the words died upon her lips. He did not want her to see his face; he tried even to suppress the groan that now and then broke from him; and those first epithets of contempt, almost of loathing for his son's sin were not repeated. He would hear the whole story out, and listen to such miserable excuses as there were to be offered for him, to

the very end. The bitter cup of shame must be drunk even to the dregs.

Marion in seeing his agitation had recovered her calmness. In the worst of her imaginings, she had never fancied Kenneth visited with such scorn as this. In one way a strange relief had come to her. If she had ever blamed him in her thoughts, she did so no longer. In this his dark hour, her heart undivided, undismayed, belonged to him. She stood by him, loved him, pleaded for him with her whole soul.

"I do not want to justify him," she was saying; "how could I? but only that you should see how after, in the hurry and misery of that terrible day, the wrong had been committed,—not by him, remember,—there were things which made it very hard for him (harder even than it must necessarily always have been to confess such a mistake), to put things straight, and tell how it had really been. Think, Uncle Norman, you who are ready to mete out to him such stern measure, think how he loved you.

"Loved me!" he answered with a groan. "Loved *me*; nay, do not make such a cruel excuse for him. Did he suppose I could love a coward?"

"It was just that—just that; he loved you

so dearly, he could not bear to forfeit your love. He was a coward about that, if you like to call him so. Oh, have pity. Think what you are—so brave and true and stern; think of having to come to you with such a story. He thought you would cast him off.”

“What if I had? It would have been better surely than to have come to this.”

“Only he loved you so.”

Not a shadow of relenting came over the set face that was turned on Marion.

“He loved you—not only selfishly—he thought it would break your heart.”

“Men’s hearts don’t break like that,” he interrupted somewhat contemptuously. “If they did, I think Kenneth’s thought would be fulfilled now.”

“His word always was, ‘My father—spare my father.’”

“An easy way to silence you, Marion, and to stifle his own conscience.”

“If you had seen how he suffered, I don’t think you would be quite so hard. When he thought of Lady Douglas—”

“Aye, when he thought of Lady Douglas; when he thought of her—what of that?”

Marion’s head drooped.

“Uncle Norman,” she said presently, “he

could not see into the future; he could not know, poor boy, how heavily his fault would weigh on others. There was no deliberation—no looking forward; every day he intended to tell you—but—you *must* understand this, surely—every day it grew harder.”

“Yes, so far I understand;” and the General started up and paced to and fro on the grass, in a storm of anger. “So far I understand, that every day sank him lower as a liar and a coward.”

Marion put up her hand to brush away her tears. The harsh words hit hard.

After a few turns up and down he grew calmer, and said to her: “Go on. Finish what you wish to say.”

She looked up hopelessly. “I don’t think anything I can say now will move you much. It may be I have been wrong, when often and often I have urged poor Kenneth to speak; he may have been right in saying ‘Let me wait—’”

“Don’t stop, Marion; you may as well tell me that he was waiting for my death.”

“I do not need to stop, Uncle Norman,” she said proudly. “I am not ashamed to tell you that he has almost longed at times, to know that you were beyond the reach of hearing of his fall, and that he was free to speak.”

“He would not have spoken—believe me. There would have been some other excuse, almost as good. There would have been Margaret’s death to wait for, or Ronald’s.”

Marion was shrinking back with a sort of repulsion and terror from the smile upon his face. “Why do you look so horrified, Marion? Does it seem to you worse in him to think of his cousin’s death, than to destroy his whole life by a cruel lie? Has he so blinded you with sophistries, poor child, that you can see no clearer than that?”

She looked up. “We were not blinded, Uncle Norman; neither Kenneth nor I. I think that our misery was, our being able to see more than one side.”

“Miserable clear-sightedness,” he said.

He left her again, then came restlessly back. “I cannot believe it, or comprehend it. It does not seem possible—such long-sustained hypocrisy. All these years, Marion!—you are sure?”

“Think how young he was when it first happened; he was a boy.”

He held up his hand. “I don’t like to hear you go on in this way; it is unworthy; it does not help his cause. A boy! so was the other one a boy, younger than Kenneth. And

he could stand by and see his victim suffer, year after year, and not relent! You will not tell me he is a boy now, I suppose?"

"He has spoken now," said Marion faintly.

"Or made you speak; shielded himself behind you from the discomfort of confessing. It is all of a piece—all black. There! it does not bear speaking of. I have been harsh to you, Marion, I know, and I ask you to pardon me—but"—his voice sank—"disgrace is new to me; I find it hard to bear. Pardon me, my child. Go away now, and leave me to myself."

An hour later she saw him again, and meantime Marion, trembling, sobbing, had knelt at Granny's feet and told her all.

Her uncle's voice was very low, but perfectly calm, when he called to her at last.

"My dear," he said, "I am going home! I shall not speak to Kenneth to-night. I am going into his room only for a moment.

Kenneth lay waiting in a state of feverish impatience for the result of his missive, but his father's manner, when at last he entered the room, checked and silenced him.

General Douglas came in and stood for a moment without speaking at the foot of the bed, and Kenneth, looking up eagerly, could

read nothing in his face. It seemed to him more like some exquisite old carving in ivory, than the face of a living man. There was no anger in it—no emotion—only the almost fearful calmness of rigid self-command. The proud and sensitive mouth was firmly closed, and motionless. Kenneth gazed as if he had never before noticed the deep lines drawn by time, the high, finely-cut nose, the somewhat hollow eyes, the silvery cloud of hair above the brow. But the stony stillness of the whole countenance awed him, and froze the words upon his lips.

“Marion has made me your confession,” said the General, and the voice was as expressionless as his face. “I will say nothing to you now. I am not yet fit to speak, or you to listen. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” responded Kenneth, looking up wistfully, and mechanically holding out his hand. His father made no motion to meet it. He rather drew back; then as he was leaving the room, he turned at the door to ask, “Are you better this evening?”

“Yes, thanks, I suppose so,” answered Kenneth, throwing himself back with a sigh, and when the door closed he sighed again, and lay pondering on his father’s face.

As General Douglas passed through the hall, he found Lady Beatrix standing waiting for him, with her sweet, anxious face. She almost thought he was going to pass her by without speaking to her, but as she said "Norman," he stopped, and took her hand and kissed it. "God has humbled me," he said, almost inaudibly. "Pray for me, dear lady," and then he left the house.

He went home, and straight up to his own room. In that room, with its narrow camp-bed and simple furniture, a single picture—a small Spanish painting—was hung on the wall opposite to the door. It represented a Figure whose Hands were clasped, and bound. Round the Head was a crown of thorns, and drops of blood were on the Brow. It was the Face of One who had been despised—"a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

As he came into the room, General Douglas's eyes met those patient ones of the Christ.

He entered into the chamber and shut the door. No human eye looked on the strong man in his agony—the proud man in his abasement. There are some spirits of scorn, of shame, of bitter anger, that go not forth but by prayer and fasting.

Was it only the first Prince of God who

wrestled with the angel until the breaking of the day ?

* * * * *

It was growing late on the following day before he returned to the Lady's Lodge, and then he looked as if ten years had passed over his head. He walked feebly, and with a stoop.

"Uncle Norman, you are ill," said Marion, going to meet him. She had been watching for him for many hours.

"No." He put his hand on her shoulder, and stood for a long time looking gravely before him, in silence. "Life has been too smooth and easy," he said at last ; "one must not look to float to Heaven upon golden clouds. God has laid me low. I thank Him. I am called to face a bitter shame. What is it to that which the Master bore ?"

"And you can be pitiful to poor Kenneth ?" asked Marion, wondering at the look of peace upon his face.

"My child," he answered, "I think I have learnt something of what temptation is," and he bent his head humbly.

"Uncle Norman, I never hoped for this."

Marion's pride of bearing was all gone, now that she no longer had to fight the battle for Kenneth.

All the afternoon they remained together ; sometimes pacing up and down—oftener sitting on the turf bench in the orchard. They did not talk much. He asked a few questions, and at intervals Marion went over the story again, more in detail than had been possible yesterday.

“And you forgive him?” she asked, longing to hear the blessed assurance once more.

He did not answer directly, but seemed to be musing.

“Last night,” he said after a time, “I thought that Kenneth’s mother came and stood by me, and asked me to forgive her son, as freely as I had once forgiven her. I never spoke to you of Kenneth’s poor little mother, Marion.”

“Never, Uncle Norman,” she answered, somewhat startled by the word “forgive.”

“No ; I never told any living soul how it was ; but it is no matter now. Poor little innocent wife !—it can hurt no one but myself now to remember it. It comes back to me so strangely to-day. I cannot help speaking about her, Marion.”

“I have often wondered about her,” said Marion gently, for she guessed that it was some respite from his present torture, to let his thoughts go back into the past.

"Aye," he answered; "I dare say,"—and he smiled.

"She was a child," he resumed presently, in a dreamy voice, "a child when I first remember her; a wild, shy little maiden of thirteen or fourteen, with rough, short, curly hair, and a quaint, quick manner. There was a great number of them—many sons and daughters of the house; but those two, my wife and her twin brother, kept themselves quite apart from all the rest. They were much younger, and cleverer, and more original than any of their brothers and sisters, and they only had eyes and ears for one another.

"They were a remarkable little couple, singularly, startlingly alike. They had just the same short dark hair curling over their heads, and the same broad foreheads, and rather deep-set blue eyes. They even shared the same name, for he was John and she was Joan—only at home no one ever called them anything but Jack and Gill. The names suited," said General Douglas, looking round at Marion with a smile, though he was speaking so like one in a dream, that she was not sure that he even saw her—"the names suited, for wherever Jack was, it was pretty sure that Jill would soon come tumbling after. I never saw them apart, or thought of one without the other.

“In those days I used to be a good deal at the house, but I was a grown man, and the children never heeded me much, nor I them; only there was a special sort of interest attached to those two, and if one could get to hear their talk it was well worth listening to.

“I suppose the boy was the leading spirit. I have often wondered what he would have turned out—poor Jack!—if he had lived; nothing very remarkable, may be, for I have observed that those precocious boys seldom fulfil the great promise of their youth. His little sister was full as clever as he was, and they never agreed in their opinion of any single subject. It was their queer ways together that attracted people’s notice; they were for ever disputing, arguing, wrangling over what they read, and learnt, and saw. Directly one said a thing the other contradicted it; if Jill praised anything Jack pounced down, and found fault with it with all his eloquence; but they were both so full of wit, and fun, and powers of reasoning, that one of their arguments, poor children, was as good as a play. Well, well, I can see them now, with their two curly heads bent over the same big book, and the two young voices that were like echoes catching each other up.

“I ought to tell you that, perhaps unfortun-

ately, Jack was not sent to school. His elder brother was delicate, and had a tutor at home, so they let Jack stay. The tutor taught him, and Jill too, I believe, much more than her sister's governess. They tried to make her learn all the things a young lady ought to know; but her heart was in Jack's Greek and mathematics, only I remember that when she began to have music lessons, Jack quietly set to work at his scales too, and always played the bass when she played the treble.

"In time I left that part of the world, and lost sight of them all for several years; and after that my regiment was ordered to the Cape. I was on the staff at that time, and only joined again later, out in Africa. I was at Dalbraith when one of my brother officers wrote to tell me that Jack Mortimer had got a commission in the regiment, and had sailed with them to the Cape. I rather wondered why they had made the boy a soldier, and I was sorry for poor little Jill. I wrote and asked my friend what kind of a fellow Jack had become. They told me he was a rough, honest lad of eighteen, very clever, for he had passed a splendid examination, but a little eccentric and argumentative.

"A month or two before I was to rejoin the

regiment, I went to pay my old friends a visit. Well, there was little Jill ; she came walking across the lawn to meet me—very quiet, and her hair not rough and curly any more. She was grown up, I suppose, but she did not speak much, and her eyes had become very large and wistful. She smiled when I asked her if she remembered me, and tossed back her head, just as Jack used to do. I really had not the heart to talk to her of Jack ; and afterwards her mother told me the parting had half killed her. Jack had set his whole heart on going into the army, and perhaps that was the sting. They had been obliged to scold his twin sister for her grief, and lately she had grown much better ; but she never mentioned Jack's name. They thought I had better not do so either, for it was better she should forget her sorrow. So I did not ; but it seemed"—the General spoke low, and a smile, half-sad, half-shy came over his face—"it seemed as if the child took kindly to me from the first. I hardly know how to tell you this part, Marion. She was very sweet and gentle. She was a great deal with me ; we used to go out fishing, and she steered the boat. I was getting on towards middle age then. She used to talk to me in her soft voice—the eagerness had gone out of

it now that Jack was away. I had been very sorry for her when I came, and afterwards things altered with me."

He paused for some time.

"I need only tell you that when the time came for me to go away, Joan—(they had given up calling her Jill)—Joan was sorry. Then I asked her to go with me to Africa, to be my wife. Marion, never to my dying day shall I forget the look on that child's face. There was a light on it—a joy, a love that made it, to my eyes, holy. She told me afterwards that she thought she should have died if I had left her behind. So in a short time I married little Joan."

The General was twisting a newspaper idly in his hand as he talked. Now he unfolded it, and held it for some minutes at arm's-length before his eyes, as if intently studying it. Marion did not move, and by-and-by he began again, quite unconscious seemingly, of the long pause he had made.

"Circumstances kept me in England for the better part of a year after my marriage, but at last we sailed for the Cape. She was very charming, Marion—full of life and glee, and of keen interest in everything. It was just as if she had a spring of hope and happiness in her

own heart. But I used to think it an odd thing, that even to me, she never cared to speak of Jack. She used to smile when I mentioned him, and when we came in sight of land, I told her she would soon see him. 'Yes,' she answered; 'it will be nice to see dear old Jack:' but she kept both her hands clasped over my arm while she spoke, and I thought—however I was wrong, so it does not matter what I thought.

"He was away up the country when we arrived. I think she asked to go off at once and join him, but that was out of the question. I don't recollect much about that; just at this time our boy, Kenneth, was born. I wanted to do all I could to please her, and after a few days I got leave for Jack, and sent for him. I remember how she looked up at me when she heard it, and laughed, and how she raised herself up to kiss me. Poor Jack!—they told me afterwards that he was in the highest spirits, wild to see little Jill again. A few hours before he should have reached us, he had a fall from his horse. I don't know how it happened; I never cared to hear; but he was dead when they picked him up. Yes—true—those things are very sad. Poor boy!

“Some one told his sister suddenly, before I could get home to prevent her hearing, and it killed her. Not directly—she lived for a little while; but I think—I think, she never was really herself again. When she recovered from that first long faint, she fixed her eyes on me with a look that made the blood freeze in my veins. She just said, ‘Where is Jack?’ and when I did not answer, she turned her face to the wall.

“One morning, soon after sunrise (I had been watching by her all night), I saw that she was conscious, and that she knew me. After a few minutes she spoke, and I will tell you what she said. ‘Norman, I have never told you the truth; I only married you because I wanted to come here, and see Jack again. I never cared for you, so God has punished me.’ The words sounded so wild, that I thought, I hoped, her mind was wandering still, but she went on: ‘No; it is quite true, I only cared for Jack. How could you think I should love any one else as well?’

“Then she told me, that when I went to stay with them, she tried, ‘Oh so much,’ she said, to make me like her. I give you her own words: ‘I thought I should go mad with joy when you asked me to go with you. I have

waited, patiently, all this time to come to Jack, and now he is dead.'

"Those were hard words, Marion, for me to hear.

"After that she was delirious, and then she was happy, I suppose, for she was with Jack in her fancy. Sometimes she laughed, sometimes she talked to him, and asked him questions. Once more before she died, she knew me, and asked, 'Is that you, Norman? I should like you to say you forgive me. Jack is dead, and I am dying—you can forgive me now.'"

"And you forgave?" said Marion.

He made a gesture of assent. "She was but a child, you see; she did not live to be a woman.

"But I said to her, 'My darling, won't you try to stay with me and your little child?' She only answered, 'No, I want to go to Jack.' She fell into a sleep before the end, and just as she was dropping off, she took me for her brother, and held out her arms to me. 'Come near me, Jack,' she said, 'come near me.' I did not speak, for it was too late then, and it might have disturbed her to hear my voice instead of his. She took hold of my hand. 'It is you, Jack. I could not find you. It is time for us to go home;' and she died in my

arms, thinking I was her brother. It was a child's one, strong, exclusive love. But I sometimes think, Marion, that poor Kenneth never rightly had a mother."

After that they sat for a long time silent, and Marion pondered over this strange little episode in a life that had been supposed to be very smooth; no hint of it had ever before reached her, or any one else. That he should have spoken of it now proved to her how deep was the wound he had just received, so deep as to have forced from him the story of that former wrong, so long forgiven, so loyally guarded from the world.

He would not see Kenneth that evening, but next day the father and son had a long interview. All that transpired of it was that General Douglas had attached one unalterable condition to his reconciliation with Kenneth,—that the young man should himself make a full avowal to Ronald of the wrong which had been done him. No condition could have seemed harder to Kenneth. After his father had been told, he had said to himself, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." He never looked for this still more humiliating atonement.

"You must do it yourself," said the General

sternly, "and in my presence;" for Kenneth muttered something about Marion. At present he was too weak to make the effort, but after a few days waiting, Ronald was to be sent for.

Those few days were miserable and anxious ones for others besides Kenneth. At Dalbraith things were not going much more smoothly than on the other side of the loch.

Both households just then were following their own separate threads of interest, which were engrossing enough to prevent their having any thought to spare for one another.

Even Grizel did not notice that in all these days General Douglas never came near Dalbraith, nor on their side did the inmates of the Lady's Lodge take any heed of Ronald's absent and pre-occupied manner, when he made his daily inquiries after his cousin.

Naturally, the accident had caused much less stir at Dalbraith than at the house where Kenneth had been carried in his half-drowned state. Ronald said little about it, and Diane for some reason she did not try to define, found it quite impossible to talk about that quarter of an hour of terror. Grizel, when she met them on their return, armed with hot cordials and warm greetings, ready to scold, and welcome, and overwhelm them with reproaches,

and questions, and delight, could not understand why the girl clung round her neck for some minutes without speaking.

"Take her to her bed, Grizel," said Douglas ; "don't you see that she is just worn out, and wet through ?"

"As for that, laddie, you might look at home," retorted Grizel ; "you with the water streaming from you as you stand, like a droukit hen."

But when the old cousin, having helped to take off Diane's wet clothes, wanted to see her warmly covered up at once, the child asked to be left alone for a few minutes.

"I want to say my prayers," she said, "and to try to thank God."

Half an hour after, when Grizel came back, full of the tale she had been hearing from Duncan the fisherman, in the kitchen, Diane lay with closed eyes, breathing with the even softness of youth and weariness, the rose-flush of sleep tinging her cheeks, and her hands clasped upon her breast.

Ronald for his part paced up and down his room, or stood leaning out of the open window, half the night, and before the day dawned let himself out of the house into the wild grey morning. Not for a moment, through all the excitement of last evening,

had he forgotten his talk with his mother. He did not come in to breakfast, but made his way to Lady Douglas's sitting-room as soon as he was sure of finding her there alone.

"Douglas," she began almost immediately, "I have been thinking over all this, again and again, and I believe that we were wrong yesterday. No one can call you a gambler."

"Not now. I have not touched a card for years."

"Just so. Therefore I consider that the past may be condoned. It was never a settled habit with you, and it is not a sufficient cause to stand in your light now."

"Only that her father thought it was. Mother, I should not be likely to put an imaginary barrier between myself and happiness."

"But he was speaking generally,—of people like his unhappy son; not of such as you."

"I might have thought so—indeed, I should have thought so; but M. de Beaurepaire was sufficiently explicit. There was no possibility of making a mistake."

"Are you quite sure?"

Ronald paused a moment.

"He told me in plain words that he should have wished for—an alliance between my

father's family and his,—under other circumstances, but that now he considered it entirely out of the question ; and then he added that he regretted having been forced to say what might annoy me. It was all plain enough."

Lady Douglas let her hands fall on to her lap, as if unwillingly convinced. "It was a harsh decision," she said.

He did not answer.

How were either of them to imagine that the words of Diane's father bore sole reference to Douglas's supposed engagement to Marion Stuart ?

She could not understand his apparent calmness. She felt herself as if she could have cried out aloud under the sting of the disappointment.

"Douglas," she said, after a short pause, "I sometimes wonder if you know what love really is !"

But she was terrified at the effect her words had on him, at the flash in his eyes, at the dark red flush that crossed his forehead.

"Forgive me," she added, quickly.

"It does not matter," he answered in a low, smothered voice. "You have been passing strange judgments on me all my life. No wonder a stranger distrusted me."

"Douglas, forgive me. I only felt that I could not have borne this as you do—that—"

"No more," he repeated, holding up his hand. "Tell me only what I can do for Diane."

"As this is the case," she resumed in a minute or two, quite subdued by his manner.

"As this is the case—"

"I ought to go away. Do not distress yourself, mother. I know it."

"This is your own house, Douglas." It was one of the sentences which used to gall him, but he took no notice now.

"I only ask what I ought to do for her?"

"You are right, then. Either you or Diane must leave Dalbraith."

"Not she," he said quickly—"not she."

After that he prepared to leave the room, but his mother called him back. "Douglas," she said, with a slight hesitation in her voice, "one thing more. Until you go, you must try to change your manner. Diane is very young; she may not have understood. It may be that Grizel and I were mistaken. Try and hide from her—what we could not help seeing."

Ronald bit his lip and turned away. "Very well," he said in a constrained voice. Perhaps the last injunction was the hardest of all.

No wonder those days were bitter ones to all

concerned. Diane could not understand it at all at first; she thought it was by accident that he was away from her all day, and she went about singing as usual; then she began to be puzzled.

Grizel was puzzled too. She tried in all sorts of blundering ways to bring the two together again. She could not bear to see the flickering colour come and go in Diane's little face, nor could she make out Ronald's distant courtesy, or the roughness that something made more tender than the gentlest words would have been. Her anxiety kept poor Grizzly on the trot all day long.

"Nanie," she said, coming into the little dark room that Diane had been allowed to make into a work-shop, and where she kept her wood-carving and her easel, "I wonder what you will do when the dark winter days come on."

"I shall carve, and work, and read hard, and learn to skate upon the loch," answered Diane, looking up from the wreath of water-lilies she was modelling. "I shall like it. I am not a bit afraid."

"But you will be so lonely, with only two old women."

She looked up quickly. "When Ronald is gone, you know!" added Grizel, ruthlessly.

The chisel made a great slip in the girl's hands. She laid it down, and turned round with a pale face. "I have spoilt my work. What were you saying?"

"I asked you if you would miss Douglas."

"Is he going?"

"That he is, and directly. Won't you tell him you will miss him, Nanie? Perhaps he would stay."

She shook her head.

After that she seemed to understand that something was wrong. She was very brave, but she trembled, steadied herself, was indignant, wistful, gentle, angry, all by turns.

In the evening, as Douglas stood in the window looking out mechanically at the moon half draped with clouds, she went quietly to the piano, and began to sing. At first her voice quivered a little, but she overcame that, and went on, only looking round between each song with one short, eager glance.

They were all the gayest songs she knew. Not a farewell or a lament among them. But as they followed each other, and he did not move or notice them, a strained jarring tone came into her voice that robbed the music of all gaiety, and made strange discords between the singer and her songs. At last she stopped,

waited a moment or two, then closed the piano very gently, and stood up.

If she could have known how hard she had made that last half-hour to Ronald, she might have spared herself and him. He had tried all the time to tear himself away, but his courage failed him.

And thus the week passed on. Ronald had lost his presence of mind, and in some degree his self-control. He was so wrapped up in his own struggle, that he scarcely knew how he appeared to others. He hardly even spoke to Diane now, hardly noticed her. When they met in the passages or on the stairs he stood back and let her pass in silence.

Once they met thus in the hall. He was going out, as she and Grizel came up the steps.

Diane did not look up this time. She tried to hurry past him, but Grizel seized her hand and stopped her.

"Ronald," she said, suddenly turning round to him, "if you and Nanie love each other, what for do ye not say so?"

Douglas stood still, spell-bound by the words. "Hush!" he began indistinctly; "you don't know what you are saying;" but Grizel laid her hand upon his arm. "Look," she said, pointing

to Diane. The girl had stopped short with parted lips, clasping her hands quickly together, but the next minute Ronald saw the great, sad, wondering eyes lifted frankly up to his.

Whatever he read in them—was it the question or the trust? both were there—made a sudden sob rise in his throat. He held out his arms, but more to push her away than to gather her to his heart, and he called out, “You must not love me, Diane ; you must not.”

“But she does,” said Grizel softly.

And then there was a pause, while the big tears brimmed over Diane’s eyes and fell. In another second he was holding her in his arms, and crying, “Forgive me, Diane. Little love, forgive me.”

Grizel slipped away choking with mingled joy and pride. She had done it now. It was all over, and the clouds were gone.

Alas ! if she could have looked back, her innocent exultation would have been rudely dashed to the ground.

Ronald had put Diane into one of the deep window-seats, and he was standing himself at the foot of the two steps that led up to the recess, or rather kneeling with one knee on the step, his arms folded, and his eyes bent on the ground, as if he would not allow himself to look

at her. He was speaking in a low voice ; she listening with her face hidden in her hands.

His short, curt sentences, unfinished sometimes or only ended by sheer force of will, and her quick-drawn sighs, told that he could not bring himself to speak, or she to listen, calmly. "My darling," he began; "you who know so much against me must hear yet more. I must tell you why you must not love me. Diane, the faults of my past life have risen up against me, and it is you who have to suffer."

And it was all told. Nothing was softened. The scene by her father's death-bed ; his last charge ; the solemn oath required and given ; of all that he could speak quietly. It was when he spoke of her coming to Dalbraith, and asked if she could forgive him for the sorrow he had caused her, that his voice changed, broke, once or twice gave way entirely.

"I knew myself to be a sin-stained and grief-stricken man, and you are a child. I thought such as you must dislike and dread me because of the great misfortune of my life. My poor mother never forgot it. Marion drew back from me when I was a boy—and then to find that you—oh, my white daisy, my little pure-hearted violet!—you—"

Diane jumped up and bent over him. She

put her hand on his shoulder, and her kiss and her tears too, fell upon his forehead. "God bless you, Diane. God bless you for ever. I can believe in Him and thank Him now—even though this is good-bye."

Poor Grizel! "The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agee."

The morning ended with an urgent summons to Douglas, to go and see his uncle without delay over at the Lady's Lodge.

CHAPTER IX.

TENDER AND TRUE.

“I’ve rocket your cradle, Lord Ronald, my son,
I’ve rocket your cradle, my handsome young man,
My heart it was light, and the tears they ran down,
But oh! they were sweet, and they dried again soon.”

IN the afternoon of that day, three people were gathered in the book-room of the Lady’s Lodge.

Kenneth lay on a couch between the window and the fire-place. His father was standing behind him, somewhat withdrawn into the shadow, and Lord Douglas leant over the back of a chair, looking down upon his cousin.

He had come in obedience to his uncle’s summons, but he was evidently restless and impatient to escape, for he had risen from his chair as soon as a few constrained sentences had been exchanged. Kenneth was equally ill at ease.

“I sent for you, Douglas,” he said when Ronald moved.

"Yes,"—and he paused, leaning over the chair.

"I owe you my life," Kenneth resumed abruptly, "and I have something to give you in exchange."

"Surely, Kenneth, that is quite unnecessary."

"I tell you fairly that I had far rather you had left me to drown, than have been saved by you, and forced out of common gratitude to say what I have to tell you now."

"Then don't say it," answered Ronald, puzzled by this strange way of speaking, and by the General's rigid stillness as he stood at the head of the couch, silent and watchful like a sentinel.

Kenneth glanced back at his father with the same look of desperate vexation and impatience. "I have no choice," he said. "You saved my life, and you have a right to your reward;" and again he paused.

"I have not a notion what you are driving at," said Ronald; "and surely it is unnecessary to talk about rewards."

"But that is just it. I must. You have left me no loop-hole. Bad as some folks think me, I have not sunk quite so low as to go on injuring the man who risked his life for mine.

I only wish he had left it alone," he added more bitterly, less in the light tone which he had hitherto assumed.

"Pray do not let us have any confessions," said Ronald quietly. "If you think you have ever done me any harm—which I don't believe—I bear you no grudge whatever."

He was thinking about Marion.

"It's on the cards," rejoined Kenneth, "that you will change your tone."

"Kenneth, you are trifling," interposed his father.

"Uncle Norman," said Ronald, "if Kenneth really has anything he wants to say to me, don't you think it might be easier for us both if you left us to ourselves?"

General Douglas shook his head. "I can't trust him," he said, without looking up.

Ronald looked from one to the other, startled and perplexed, and for the first time roused to the perception that something of real importance was on hand.

"Of course *I* do not mind your being here," he said, "for I have not the smallest clue to all this mystery."

"There is no mystery," began Kenneth in a low, quick, husky voice. "This is the whole of it. Years ago, when I was a boy, I let you

be deceived, and deceived you myself. Now the time has come to undeceive you. The mystery, as you call it, dates back from the day of your father's death."

Kenneth paused to breathe. He heard his father draw a quick breath too. Both knew that he was committed now beyond recall.

"Go on," said Ronald.

"It is not so easy to go on. You remember that day—in the wood—I came to tell you of the accident."

"I remember."

"Well, can't you guess? You were told you had done it. Don't you understand now?"

"I understand nothing," replied Ronald briefly.

"God knows I thought you had done it when I came to tell you. I was mistaken."

"How were you mistaken?"

"Good heavens, Ronald! will you never understand? I tell you I was deceived myself. It has been harder on me than on you."

"Forgive me," said Ronald, turning to his uncle. "I suppose I ought to know what it all means, but I don't. The thought of that day always confuses me. Tell me in plain words, Uncle Norman."

General Douglas referred him by a gesture back to Kenneth.

"In plain words then, Adam Haldane told me you had shot your father. It was a lie. I shot him."

"Merciful God!" exclaimed Ronald, falling back a step or two.

He did not realize at all in that first moment the burden that had been lifted from himself. He only understood that a weight such as that which had crushed his own life for years, had fallen on his cousin. "Kenneth! and you never knew."

Kenneth looked up again at his father. The torture of having the story dragged from him piecemeal by Ronald's slowness of apprehension, was almost more than he could support. He had cleared his cousin now. What was the good of saying any more? Why not, at least for the moment, leave Douglas to believe that he too had only just learnt the truth?—but he read no sign of relenting on his father's face.

What those moments were to General Douglas, who can tell? He saw, without returning it, the glance of unworthy entreaty in Kenneth's eyes; he saw Ronald's face, full of pity and wonder. He prepared himself to speak, giving Kenneth, with a breaking heart,

just one more chance. He heard a half-laugh, that most assuredly carried with it no suggestion of mirth, and Kenneth's voice said, "That is why I tell you that you have something to forgive. I did know it!" and then he saw the flash of utter incredulity pass over Ronald's face.

"You knew it, and you told no one? I don't believe it."

"I told Marion," said Kenneth, "and she begged me to tell you. I bound her by an oath to keep my secret. It was no fault of Marion's."

"Marion!" exclaimed Ronald; and then suddenly he seemed to believe what he had heard, and a flame of passionate horror and anger, blazed up and took entire possession of him.

"You knew it!" he repeated hoarsely, taking a step forward.

"Adam Haldane told me."

"You knew it, and you stood by, and saw it all, and never told?"

"You must consider, Ronald,—"

"Answer me: you knew it all these years?"

"I knew it, but—"

He stopped with an involuntary backward movement, and General Douglas with one quick

stride came forward and caught the arm that Ronald in his fury was raising on his cousin.

“He is helpless,” the General said in a low voice.

Their eyes met—Ronald’s and his uncle’s—a deep flush mounted to the young man’s forehead, and he fell down on his knees at the foot of the couch, his head bent forward on his folded arms.

His was a nature strong to trust, strong to suffer, strong therefore to resent. He knelt on with his face hidden, motionless, unconscious of the presence of any one else. He did not know with what startled, eager eyes, Kenneth was watching him ; he did not see the gathering misery in his face, as he began to realize that pardon was not the easy, matter-of-course thing he had expected to win so lightly. Ronald did not feel Norman’s hand laid for an instant on his bowed head, nor had he any power to think of the crushing blow that had fallen upon the father,—that mirror and soul of knightly honour.

But Norman Douglas had put away and renounced all personal share in this sorrow. His self-consciousness was merged in the realization of what his two boys were going through. He felt that to both had come the darkest hour

of their lives ; to Kenneth as well as to Ronald—the darkest hour of temptation. For the first time Kenneth was seeing his sin, even as it was, unmasked and stripped of the sophistries with which he had always contrived to cover up its ugliness. For the first time the terror of the unforgiven was upon him. For the first time there dawned upon him the meaning of the word Despair. For if his cousin, if Ronald could not forgive him,—Ronald, who himself needed pardon for many things in his life—if to Ronald the injury looked so black, how could God, the All-just, the All-holy, forgive his sin ? His father, knowing well how the full meaning and scope of God's forgiveness, had never touched his son's heart, feared for him as he saw him, surprised and shivering, shrink back from the grasp of that shadow, who has been truly called the Giant Despair.

And then Ronald—poor, true, strong-hearted Ronald, who had yet wasted so much of his life and of his strength, that to struggle up to that serene height of virtue which would enable him to forgive, seemed an unattainable achievement—Ronald too, had met the tempter in a new form to-day, and rage and hate pinioned his soul closely, and forbade him to think of pardon.

For him, too, his uncle felt that a turning-point had come. The choice between good and evil was given him in this hour. If the lower nature was suffered now to prevail, that bright spark that had ever shone in his soul, and told of a Divine essence burning there yet, would most surely be dimmed or quenched.

Norman Douglas stood there silent, but not helpless, to watch the fight. Like Moses on Mount Horeb, his arms were lifted up, and his whole soul rose to God, in one mighty agony of prayer for victory. Kenneth, turning on his father his startled anxious eyes, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel in its strength of pity and of pleading.

Still silence!—still it seemed as if Ronald never even breathed. Still the ticking of the clock, beating out second after second, until half an hour had passed. There are times when thirty minutes seem like eternity—unending.

Once Kenneth, unable longer to bear the suspense, raised himself suddenly, and stretched out his hand to rouse his cousin, but an imperative sign from his father stopped him. For neither of them would Norman Douglas shorten that hour, bitter though it was.

Afterwards, Ronald, in speaking of it as he did once or twice to one person, very briefly,

called it his "agony." But he did not tell—probably he could not call back—the storm of thoughts that swept over him, after that first impulse of blind violence, and the shame that followed it. When Kenneth once described in his hearing his experience when he was drowning, and how, after the waters closed on him, there rushed over him, as in a dream, each scene of his past life, Ronald said quickly, "Yes, I know how," and turned away. It may be, that as he went down, and was overwhelmed by the dark waters of hatred and horror, some such vision passed before him of his life, wasted and distorted by a lie.

It was his dog, Bounce, who roused him at last. The whole time, like a touch of homely humour in a tragic picture, Bounce stood, head on one side and tail half-mast high, watching his master acutely, with a world of meaning in his face.

With that odd second thread of thought, that all are familiar with in the most critical moments of their life, General Douglas had seen the dog's perplexity, and had sympathized with him. He saw his sense of injury, his wish to understand, his doubt whether it would be excusable in him to interfere. Once, without moving his head, Bounce glanced reproachfully out of the

corners of his eyes at the General; then he softly advanced one paw, and whined. At last, almost to General Douglas's relief, for the tension was rapidly becoming unbearable for Kenneth's sake, Bounce's sense of discipline gave way to loving impatience, and he launched himself with a bark on to his kneeling master.

Ronald rose to his feet instantly, glanced from his uncle to Kenneth, and stood with his head bent down beside the couch.

"Ronald, for mercy's sake say something." Kenneth's voice broke the long stillness with an odd mixture of entreaty and vexation.

"Say," repeated Ronald; "say what?"

Kenneth sighed. "Can't you say that you forgive?"

"Have you ever thought of my mother?" asked Ronald, in a low, deep voice.

"God knows I have," said Kenneth, after an interval of startled thought. "God knows I have, often,—often."

Ronald looked at him.

"And yet you did not speak?" he said, and then seemed to ponder again.

Once more Kenneth tried to wring from him some word of relenting, but Ronald stopped him fiercely, bidding him be silent, and let him think. Alas, for those thoughts which

had not turned to prayers!—that silent, savage brooding over his own wrongs. His face hardened and darkened more and more.

General Douglas crossed the floor, and opened the door quietly into the adjoining room, and the sound roused Ronald. He turned himself towards Kenneth as if to speak, his eyes fastened on his cousin's face, and on the strained ears fell—slowly, clearly, resolutely uttered,—the deliberate words of a curse.

“Coward!” he called his cousin. “Liar, traitor!” and for the destruction of his mother's love, for the evil he had wrought between them, for the utter ruin of his own life, he cursed him.

Just then the door, opened by General Douglas, was pushed further back. Marion, pale as death, stood on the threshold, and behind her was Lady Douglas.

Ronald's mother stood still. Marion rushed forward with a cry, and caught his hand. “Ronald, Ronald, have mercy.”

He had not even heard her enter, but at her voice he stopped speaking instantly, pausing abruptly with an unfinished sentence on his lips. “Ronald, unsay your words. Call them back,” she prayed him wildly. “You don't know what you were saying.”

He raised the hand she had put upon his arm gently, and kissed it. He looked at her with a sort of smile.

“Marion,” he said, “*you* are as true as steel.”

Turning, he met his mother. Marion was silent then—all were silent. They knew what that meeting must be to him. Even Kenneth, with the new curse upon his head; Marion in her despair; General Douglas in this supreme moment of his wrestling in prayer with a God who did not seem to hear—alike forgot everything, to watch how these two would bear themselves.

How strange it was! How unlike what might have been foretold, of the moment when mother and son would stand face to face, the cloud between them gone!

She was holding out her arms towards him. She would have put them round his neck, but he raised his hands quickly and took hers in them, holding her away from him, while he looked into her face.

It was white, set, scared. The horror of that long-past day of horror had been brought surging round her again. And in her eyes he read—or thought he read—the old, never-forgotten struggle between pity and repulsion.

Still holding her away, he said slowly, "You know now that I did not kill your husband!"

"My poor son!" whispered Margaret; "my poor son!"

Douglas laughed, a sudden jarring laugh. "I don't wonder you can't believe it. I can't believe it myself." And then he dropped her hands, and without looking at any of them again he left the room.

Marion had fallen back against the wall. Lady Douglas stood still just where he had left her, and Kenneth lifted up his bloodless face towards his father, with a smile that looked to Marion as if the withering effects of the curse were already working on him. "The help you counted on and prayed for, has forsaken us, it seems," he said.

Norman Douglas raised his head. His nostrils were quivering, his hand shook, his breath came short and hard; but at his son's sneer, a gleam of triumphant faith and love streamed across his face.

"The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth," he said solemnly, lifting up his hand, "and He hath not forsaken us."

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Late that night a messenger came to Dalbraith from the hills, with a few lines from

Ronald, bidding Grizel tell his mother that he had gone to the north shooting-lodge.

The events of the day had fairly overwhelmed poor Grizel. She had begun it with such bright hopes, and such a sense of successful management. But her pride had soon been taken down. She spent most of the morning rocking Diane in her arms, fondling and comforting her like a little child, for the girl in her first grief came straight to the kind old woman, and with her arms round Grizel's neck and her eyes hidden on her shoulder, whispered in broken words the sad little story of her love and its hopelessness. People might laugh at Grizzy, but she knew at least one art of healing ; she could weep with those who weep.

"My lamb, my Nanie ! Whist, my bonnie bairn." Somehow the childish words comforted Diane better than wiser ones would have done.

But what was the great rush of feeling that came later, when Kenneth's avowal reached Dalbraith ? Was it joy, or was it pain, or was it both together ? Pure pity in Grizel's heart for the laddie who had gone so far astray, and must have suffered so much ; pride and gladness for Ronald ; and oh ! such an aching sense

that the wrong which had been done him could never be put right.

Diane, wearied out with tears and sorrow, had fallen asleep. She awoke to find the evening shadows gathering in her turret-room and Grizel standing by her bed, with a face full of awe and wonder.

"My Diane," she said, "I have tidings for you. God has sent a word of comfort to our Ronald;" and she told what she had just heard.

"Oh," cried Diane, springing up, and clasping her hands in ecstasy, "thank God. Thank God. Oh, my Ronald! my Ronald!"

Grizel stroked her hair tenderly. "My bonnie dear, I'm fearing that it makes but little difference between you and him."

"I know that." Diane looked at her with a smile that was almost unearthly in its intensity of pure unselfish joy. "I know that. What does that matter? Oh Douglas, my hero! —free, free at last."

"And little good will it do him to be free, poor fellow, if he can't have you," sighed Grizel.

"Cousin Grizel," said the girl, "you don't know; you can't know; no one knows what this has been to him. And this day the load

is lifted off his heart, and the weight that spoils his life is taken away. God is good ; God is just ; and Douglas can hold up his head, his noble head, among his fellows. Oh, he will not miss me now ; he will not need me half so much. Don't tell me not to be glad, Cousin Grizzly."

"My dear," said Grizel, "you are very generous. I love you for it. But,—"

Diane kissed her, and softly stroked her face. "No, Cousin Grizel, we must not grieve to-day. We are too happy. We can only think of Douglas—in his joy and gratitude."

"But he went away angry. He is not glad or grateful. How can he forgive a wrong like that ? He has gone away with bitter anger in his heart."

"Dear Cousin Grizel," said Diane with a soft proud smile, "don't you know him better than to be afraid ? Our Douglas, 'tender and true.' Can't you trust him ?"

Downstairs Ronald's mother was sitting by herself, staring at the fire, like a person in a trance. On no one had the revelation made to-day, broken with a more startling shock. The moment when her son turned from her outstretched arms, was an era in her life. It was as if a flash of lightning had darted out, and showed her for a moment all her past ; all

her weak self-pity ; her narrow grief ; all the harm which she had done. She looked round with a vacant gaze at General Douglas, at Marion still leaning breathlessly against the wall, at Granny who had stolen softly in and was bending over Kenneth's couch.

Margaret was the first to leave the room, and by-and-by Marion came to her and knelt down before her, and took her hands, looking up with an agony of dumb entreaty into her face.

Lady Douglas looked at her with a strange sudden stirring of pity. "Do you love—this young man, Marion?" she asked in a low voice.

"With my whole—whole heart," answered Marion steadily, though two red spots of colour rose on her white cheeks.

The girl's loyalty and unswerving love threw a halo over her unworthy lover. Surely there must be some redeeming quality in Kenneth to have won such love as this. Henceforth those who spoke of him in her presence, nay, even in her absence, were forced to do so with a certain unwilling respect. At all events they refrained from one contemptuous epithet. To love, and not to be able to respect ! It was a hard fate for one like Marion.

But once again she stood by him as the

good angel of his life. ' He was lying an hour later, with his hands clasped over his eyes, thoughts of rebellion and despair chasing one another across his mind ; dreary doubts and stinging shame crushing him to the ground ; when a slow step roused him.

The room was getting dusk ; he could just distinguish a tall figure in black standing by his couch. It was the last person in the world he should have dreamt of seeing there. " Lady Douglas !" he said in a whisper, trying mechanically to stand up.

She gently pushed him back, and bending over him, she kissed his forehead.

" Cousin Margaret !" — the words were hurried and smothered. "*You !* — can *you* forgive ? Do you not hate me ?"

" No, no ; never that again ;" and after a pause she added : " I know what it must have cost you, poor Kenneth."

She glided away ; but that which neither his bitter shame, his father's compassion, Granny's tenderness, had been able to wring from him, Marion had won for him now. Those words, that kiss from the widow and the mother of the Douglas's, broke down his pride and his despair.

" Marion," he called ; and as she hurried to

his side he said breathlessly, "Call my father." General Douglas came. "Marion," repeated Kenneth, holding her hand tightly, "tell me what to say."

She fell on her knees by him, whispering the words: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee"—

"And I am no more worthy," added Kenneth with one deep sob, "to be called thy son."

It was late on the evening of the next day, that General Douglas dismounted from his pony at the door of the lonely shooting-lodge up on Ben na Gruach. He found his nephew in the house, brooding sullenly over a smouldering fire. The room was low, and roughly-furnished, with small windows that let in little of the scanty daylight, so that at first the newcomer could hardly make out the outline of the figure in the chimney-corner, especially through a dense cloud of tobacco-smoke.

Ronald looked up rather impatiently; evidently he had not expected his solitude to be invaded, and half-resented it, though he said nothing, only moved forward without alacrity, pitching his cigar upon the hearth as he did so.

"I have not come to disturb you on my own account, Ronald; I come from your mother."

"Sit down, Uncle Norman," was the only answer.

Douglas went across the room, flung open one of the small windows, and threw himself down heavily again in his own chair.

"I can understand your not caring to be intruded on. I am sorry, Douglas."

There was a gentle courtesy and dignity in his manner that it was difficult to resent or resist.

"I only wish I could give you a better welcome," returned Ronald, with an attempt at greater cordiality. "I am quite alone up here."

"Your mother is very anxious you should come back. She is uneasy lest you should leave the country without seeing her again. There is much she wants to say to you since my unhappy son's confession."

"There is no good in my going back," said Ronald gloomily.

"Only that it is your mother's wish. She sent for me this morning. It is difficult for me to speak to you on this subject; but if you could hear from herself, that which she said to me, it would be well. 'Tell him for one thing,' she said, 'that I have wasted my life and his, and that I know it.' Forgive me,

Ronald—I have no right, I feel, to intrude advice upon you—but a son can hardly allow his mother so to humble herself before him, and make her no return.”

Douglas glanced at the worn face opposite him. “All this is very hard on you, Uncle Norman,” he said abruptly.

“Let us leave that aside.”

Douglas pushed the dying embers roughly together with his foot. “Look here, Uncle Norman,” he began quickly by-and-by, “you should not have come here. I cannot sit here and talk to you, and yet feel as I do to Kenneth—and that I cannot alter. You had better let me go my own way.”

“Come back with me to Dalbraith, Ronald,” said the General, passing over the last part of this speech with a sigh.

“No; I won’t do that;” but in spite of his rough tone he was touched by the sad patience of his uncle’s manner. For the first time he felt a wish to be able to forgive. Hitherto, he had brooded without ceasing over that unpardonable chain of injuries, the first link of which was his mother’s coldness and estrangement, the last and heaviest, the loss of Diane. For it all came from that one dastardly act—the misery that had driven him to gambling that

he might forget—the recklessness that had been his ruin. It would be almost faithless to Diane to forget the cause of their separation.

“You don’t know half that this has brought on me,” he said after another long interval of silent pondering.

The General made no answer. He only slightly shook his head.

“I should have come to grief anyhow, as likely as not,” proceeded Douglas. “There’s nothing particularly to be gained by putting the blame on other people—and yet—” He took up the old game-book that lay on the table near him, turned over its pages rapidly, and flung it down again. “Things must remain as they are, Uncle Norman.”

His hearer looked at him compassionately.

Ronald moved restlessly, shaded his face with his hand, and beat his foot upon the floor. It seemed to his uncle as if it was a restraint on him to feel that he was being watched. He got up presently. “I will come back to you, Ronald, before I go away.”

Douglas raised his head. “There is no use in *saying* I forgive if it means nothing.”

Again the General made no reply, but he turned slowly to leave the room.

“It is hard work, Uncle Norman.”

Norman Douglas put his hand for a second on the young man's head, as he had done yesterday. "God be with you in that work, my son," he said, "and give you grace that you may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon you the armour of light."

"Don't go, please," said Ronald; "we need not talk."

The General sat down again quietly. Ronald felt the help of the man's mere presence. He too had met temptation, and had overcome.

Now and then Ronald raised his eyes. The other did not stir, but sat leaning back with his head a little raised, gazing abstractedly at a rough sketch of Ronald's father, that hung high up on the wall. He remembered well its being done by an artist friend, during one of the merry shooting parties of long past days. He remembered Tam Glen, the old white pony, across whose back, in the drawing, a dead stag was slung. Lord Douglas's figure, with his rifle over his shoulder, was full of spirit, though it had been thrown aside and left unfinished, when artist and sitter started off for the forest. The old forester found it some days afterwards, and got it framed at Inverness.

General Douglas well remembered his pride when he had hung it just under the ceiling of

the sitting-room at the Lodge. But now he scarcely saw the picture on which his eyes were resting. His thoughts were more with the living than the dead.

Noble as his face had always been, Ronald felt that there was something higher in it to-day than there had ever been before—something that appealed to him with greater force than words. Here was one who had indeed suffered and conquered suffering; who was wounded and forgave; a haughty man to whom the shadow of disgrace was worse than death; but who yet had met it meekly, humbling himself under the mighty hand of God. The mist came across Ronald's sight, as he watched the keen proud face, now so gentle and resigned.

And when with a rush, the recollection swept across him of all he owed his uncle, the question came with it also—Who was he that he should refuse forgiveness? Was it thus he should repay the strong, forbearing, patient care that had never failed his boyhood? Whatever the provocation—and even now he could not undervalue it—was it for him to call down a curse on the head of his uncle's son? There was horror in the thought.

"Uncle Norman," he exclaimed suddenly, "what have I been about? My dear old

Uncle, are you asking me to forgive a son o yours ? I wonder how often you have forgiven me—who am unworthy to forgive ?”

He started up and crossed the hearth impulsively. His uncle stood up too. “Can you do this thing,” he asked gravely, holding out his hand, “with your whole heart, Ronald ? Remember this must be once and for ever.”

“Amen,” said Ronald, wringing the offered hand ; “so be it then,—once and for ever.”

Meanwhile the night had closed in, but the moon would rise by-and-by, and by her light General Douglas purposed returning to Dalbraith.

“You will give me something to eat,” he said, “and afterwards you will come back with me, Ronald.”

Douglas hesitated and sighed. How could he go back so soon, and see Diane again ? Between every one else there might be forgiveness and peace, but none the less were he and Diane parted.

His uncle marked his hesitation. “I will go and see after my own pony at least, and you can think about it. Meanwhile there is a letter that I want you to look at while I am gone. Do me the favour, Ronald, to read it carefully.”

He took a paper out of his pocket-book, and

laid it on the table beside Ronald. Then he lighted a candle, blowing together the dying embers that he might do so. The young man looked on with listless eyes. It was an old faded letter that was placed beneath his hand, crushed, and in part torn away. "I shall be glad to discuss it with you, when I come in again, Ronald," said the General, turning at the door, as he saw that his nephew made no motion to take it up. Ronald unfolded it wearily, when he was left alone. It was written in French, in an unfamiliar hand, in small pointed characters that were difficult to decipher, and it called Norman Douglas, "Mon cousin."

Reading hurriedly, and at first carelessly, as the long-winded descriptive sentences seemed to point at nothing especially interesting, Douglas found himself presently involved in an enthusiastic, detailed, passionately admiring description of an ideal woman. (Very French, he muttered to himself.) She was noble, this woman of whom the letter dealt, pure-hearted, pious, forgiving injuries, rewarding good for evil, gracious, and in every way distinguished. "*Telle a été notre parente, Lady Beatrix.*" Those were the first words that fixed Douglas's attention. He glanced hurriedly at the signature, and

saw as he had expected, "Marquis de Beaurepaire." Reading on he came upon this passage—"And so, as they tell me, the little Marion, grandchild of that so-admirable woman, marries the young Lord Douglas, son to the chosen friend of my youth. '*J'y consens volontiers*,' glad that a gleam of sunshine so bright, should gild the evening of my respectable cousin's life, the touching story of whose youth still makes the heart to beat. We owe her something of reparation—we Beaurepaires, through whom, alas! the morning of her days was so heavily shadowed by clouds. I rejoice in her joy. For she may leave her child tranquilly, *chère* Norman, in such hands. I know the young man—the young Douglas—well. I have studied him much. I know all his history since the sad mischance of his boyhood. I watched him when my poor son Gaston, for a brief space, threw over him an evil but unavailing spell; and I can tell you this—that if, instead of to my dear friend's grandchild, the prospect of a husband so noble, a fate so secure and serene, had fallen to the lot of my little Diane, I who speak to you would say my *Nunc Dimittis* gaily to-morrow itself, and shut my eyes in peace upon this weary world."

Ronald read no more. It was as though a

voice from the other world had spoken—a dead father had granted him his child. His head sank forward on to the table, resting on the hands that still grasped the open letter.

“Well, Ronald,” said his uncle’s voice beside him after a long time had passed.

He jumped up.

“Uncle Norman, how soon can we get back to Dalbraith? Do you mind rather a dark ride? I *must* get home as quick as I can. You haven’t the least notion what this letter has done for me. There is not a moment to explain now. By the way though, why did you show it to me? You don’t mean to say you guessed? Was it for that? My dear Uncle Norman!” as he saw his uncle smile.

“How on earth did you find out?” he added.

“I cannot say I found it particularly hard,” replied the General dryly; “but in point of fact your mother gave me a hint how the land lay.”

Ronald seemed hardly able to wait for an explanation, or to attend to it when given. He crossed the room, and throwing open the door shouted some impatient orders to an unseen individual, who responded in guttural tones from the back of the Lodge. His uncle stood watching him; he moved, spoke, looked like a

man from whom a crushing load had been suddenly lifted off. There was a freedom, a lightness, in his every step and gesture; a curious sense of suppressed rapture, in the long breath he drew when he came back to the fire-side and the General. But there was a trial of patience in store for him. A blinding mist had gathered over the hills with the twilight, and the fog was so dense that even the most ardent lover would fail to keep the track, or to miss the craigs and chasms that would beset his path. By-and-bye the rain came pelting down, and gusts of wind shook the Lodge to its foundations, rattling the windows, and roaring like great guns in the chimney.

There was nothing for it but to wait with as much equanimity as he could muster, for the daylight.

"Now, Uncle Norman, can you explain things a little?" asked Ronald, as they sat on opposite sides of the fire—"that letter?"

"I have had it by me for two years. By some queer chance—or providence—I did not burn it, as I do most of my letters."

"And you never showed it me."

"Why should I? I had resolved never again to interfere as I once did, most unwisely, between you and poor Marion. I

looked on, and I hoped, but I would do nothing. Indeed, until your mother spoke to me yesterday I did not know the rights of it all."

"But now, this evening—all this time, you had this letter in your pocket."

Unconsciously the General drew himself up. "This evening I would not appear to offer you a price for your pardon to my son. It would have been time enough to give you the letter when you had finally refused it to him. Besides," and his voice softened, "I wanted you to have the blessing of granting full forgiveness, while the cloud was still over you."

"I understand that," said Ronald, "and I thank you. But, Uncle Norman, you can't tell what this is."

"I know Diane, my boy; I do not much wonder at you."

Ronald turned away quickly to the window, striving to keep his command over himself.

"You are sure this is sanction enough," he said, coming back with the letter still in his hand, and speaking in an anxious voice. "I have to think for her."

"Entirely so," answered the General emphatically. "Let yourself be happy, Ronald. God wills it."

It seemed as if Ronald hardly knew how to manage the great flood of happiness that had come upon him in the last half hour. It almost puzzled him, it was so new a sensation ; and in truth, he wanted to get away by himself, that he might look this dazzling joy fairly in the face.

For the last four and twenty hours he had been brooding unceasingly over a dark wrong, and bitterly regretting a lost past. It was not until, with a mighty effort, he had cast resentment and hatred behind him, that he at all began to realize from what he had been delivered by Kenneth's confession. Looking up, his eyes caught the dusky outline of his father's picture. It was a fact that the sight of this rough, happy-looking sketch had always given him a sharper pang than any of the other things that recalled his father. Now with the swift stab of accustomed pain, came also a wild rush of relief and exultation. For the first time it burst upon him that the sting of his grief was gone.

He forgot even Diane for a moment, and stood gazing upwards like one entranced. "O Father!" he said half aloud, "I had no hand in your death."

A short sigh, instantly checked, recalled him

to himself. He turned round. The solitary gilly who tenanted the lodge, had just brought in a flaring lamp, and the two men could see each other's faces. Ronald had scarcely found out before how changed his uncle was; how aged and wearied-looking. He put his hand now tenderly on his shoulder.

"Uncle Norman," he said very gently, "I wish I could say what I feel. I owe all that makes me glad now to you."

The other made a gesture of dissent. "To Marion," he said, sinking his head still lower—"not to me."

"To both." He hesitated. "Do you mind my speaking to you of Kenneth?"

A sort of spasm crossed the father's face. "Kenneth," he said in a low voice, "is returning to India. The signs of mutiny are becoming more serious, and his place is by Charley Stuart's side. He goes immediately."

"To India! But, poor fellow, he has only just come home; he is still weak. He has scarcely seen you all—and Marion. Isn't that rather hard on him?"

"Kenneth wishes it;" his voice was scarcely above a whisper.

"I am very sorry for him," resumed Ronald,

choosing his words cautiously. "I am sure he has gone through much suffering."

"He has. Pardon me, Ronald, if I prefer not to speak of him. I will only say that my prayer is, that he may be granted a chance to retrieve in some degree, the name that he has"—his voice failed; he put his hand before his eyes, and Douglas standing before him with a deep feeling of respect and of humility, said no word more.

He was too restless to sleep at all that night. General Douglas occupied the one habitable sleeping-room, and Douglas wandered about on the hill, enjoying the midnight storm, and watching impatiently for the first streak of light. At last he went in, piled up a blazing fire, and stretching himself on the hearthrug, slept heavily till morning.

The sun shone brilliantly when he awoke. Swollen burns, white with foam, went leaping and sparkling on their way, and snowy mist-wreaths floating in the sun rose, from the hill-tops. Here and there a silver streak ran down the mountain side. There had been a sharp frost just before day dawned, and the hoar-frost glittered like jewels among the autumn

leaves. The tinted trees looked like the banners of a triumphal procession; scarlet and amber, and flame-colour. The keen and "nimble" air was clear as crystal—the sky intensely blue and swept quite bare of clouds.

The sun had climbed but a short way over the mountain before Douglas came riding down the fairy glen. His horse stepped on a cloth-of-gold carpet, made of fallen beech-leaves.

"Diane knows nothing. We left it to you to tell her," his uncle said to him, as they parted at the foot of Norman's Tower.

Grizel was the first to meet him in the hall, but she only wrung his hand, and hurried past, pointing back to Diane.

It was a very pale, weary little face with heavy eyes, that greeted him first, but it flushed like a rose, as she came to him with outstretched hands, and words of eager welcome. They had not met since the fateful interview with Kenneth.

"Douglas. I am so glad—so glad!"

He broke into a quick, short, joyous laugh.

"But, oh! sweet-heart," he said, and he drew her to him, pressing her father's letter into her hand, and looking down with glad eyes into her wondering face, "you can't tell half how glad I am!"

Half-an-hour afterwards she took him by the hand, and led him to the door of his mother's room. He knocked softly, and went in alone, and as the door closed on him Diane sank upon her knees and prayed.

It was a very long time before he came out, and then the tears were standing in his eyes. "Diane," he said, "she called me Ronald—and she blessed me. Dear love, help me to thank God."

"A lassie from the East," broke out Grizel suddenly. "She has done it. Don't you see it, Ronald?—Marion!"

"My dear Grizzy, I don't see certainly; but we are going to Marion presently," he said.

"India—the East; she was born in India," continued Grizel, incoherent with excitement. "'The red hand white.' 'The Doom of Dalbraith.' She has saved you, Ronald."

"She has indeed," he answered gravely.

"But don't you see? Isn't it most remarkable? The false is true now, and your red hand, my poor Ronald, is washed white by our own lassie from the East. The doom that we have feared from generation to generation has been averted—and by our Marion."

“Brave, faithful Marion!” he said, as Diane came to his side.

“And you are really happy, Ronald?” asked Grizel, beaming on them both.

“Happy,” he echoed with a quick downcast glance at the shining brown head close to his shoulder. “Happy! why, Grizel——”

LAST WORDS.

So our story—the story of Ronald and Diane—is finished—or begun. And the sun shines at Dalbraith.

But there is yet one, of whom Ronald's wife would fâin say a word—one—nay, two !

There is one who has brought late honour on our house. One who, when the red war-clouds closed darkly over India, was ever full of courage, ever steadfast, ever faithful to his trust. One who in the open field, and in the awful siege of Lucknow, did not fail, nor flinch; who in the extremest hour of peril helped to hold up the courage of the dwindling garrison, who prized not his own life, but freely risked it for the sake of others, and who ever, through all those gruesome months, bore in his heart two inspiring names, those of "Father" and of "Marion."

He was not the less brave, the less daring, the less enduring, that there was little room in his mind for the thought of fame won for

himself. From first to last one motive actuated him, one passion nerved him,—the motive of atonement—the passionate longing to comfort his old father, and to heal his wound.

He came home when the troubles were over, leaving behind him a name that was honoured through the length and breadth of India, and he found that old father, waiting for the calm closing of his earthly days.

We, at Dalbraith, watched eagerly for our soldier's coming; we feared he would not be in time for what we knew he longed for—one word of approval from his father's lips.

Our dear General could not see his son's face when at last he came, but he knew his voice, and a smile that was like the glory of a sunset lit up his face.

"Kenneth," he said joyfully, "my son;" and as Kenneth knelt down, all listened intently, for we had thought to hear his voice no more. And the words he spoke were half his own, half familiar words, older and more beautiful than his.

"Kenneth," he said slowly and with a smile; "Kenneth, my son, dearly beloved and longed for; my joy—and crown."

A great gladness lit up the worn face of the

soldier son—the great gladness of a long sorrow ended.

He kissed the dear grey face, then knelt again, listening if haply he should speak once more. No words followed.

But was there indeed need of any other word ?

THE END.

Hungary :

CLAY AND TAYLOR, THE CHAUCER PRESS.

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